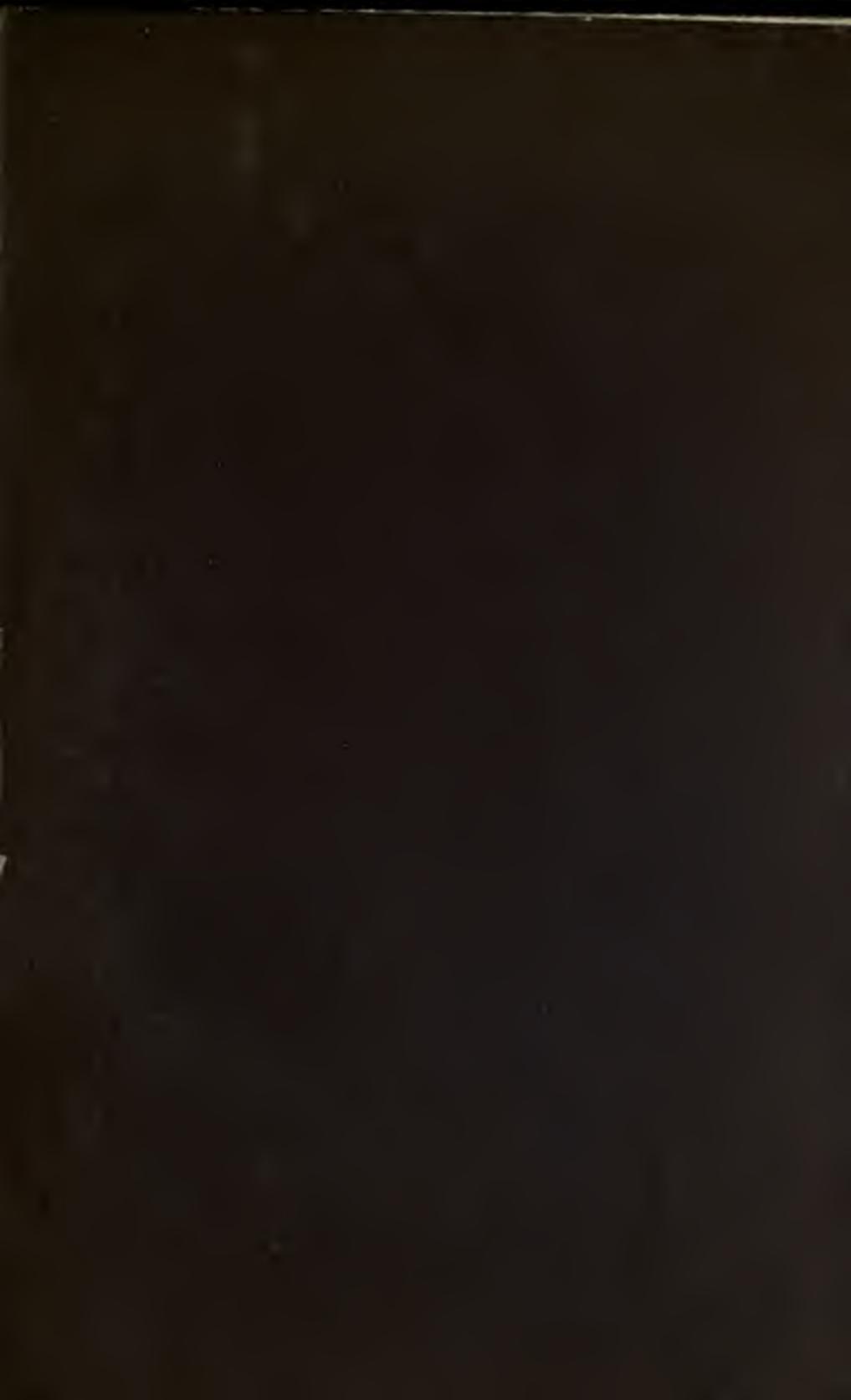


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DOUBLES AND QUILTS

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"And he shall have a nosegay too."



DOUBLES AND QUILTS

BY

LAURENCE W. M. LOCKHART

AUTHOR OF 'MINE IS THINE,' 'FAIR TO SEE,' ETC.

WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

SYLVESTRIS

NEW EDITION

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
MDCCCLXXIX



PR
4891
L5D6
1879

PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION.

WHEN ‘Doubles and Quits’ first saw the light, more than ten years ago, it had the good fortune to do so as a contribution to ‘Blackwood;’ and when its course through the Magazine was completed, the author did not hesitate to republish it in a separate form. He was encouraged to do so by the somewhat flattering reception which the press and the public had accorded to it during its progress as a serial; and he was not less encouraged by the unfailing kindness of the Editor, who had admitted it to his distinguished pages, and thus stamped it with a hallmark of no mean significance. Here, however, the author met with his first literary rebuff; for the favour with which the story, while under the ægis of ‘Maga,’ had been received, was not extended to the reprint. The author went through the usual phases of early authorial disappointment, laying all

the blame upon the blindness of a purblind public, upon the decadence of criticism, upon the library system, upon the bookstalls—perhaps even upon the bookstall boys. At all events, he had none to spare for the pen and the brain which were primarily responsible for the catastrophe, and which he vowed should never again lend themselves to the casting of pearls before swine.

But such emotions are, for good or evil, generally evanescent, and the author very soon committed himself to a fresh literary venture. On that occasion he met with an unexpected measure of success, and since then the public has accorded to his humble performances a kind favour which has surpassed all his hopes, and for which he cannot sufficiently express his gratitude.

He wishes, however, to avoid even the semblance of presuming upon that kindness, and therefore desires to state that, in taking the somewhat unusual step of publishing a second reprint of this story, after so long an interval of time, he does so simply in compliance with a substantial demand which, from some cause or other, the publishers assure him has arisen, and which it is impossible for him to disregard. He has only farther to add that, in reintroducing his maiden effort to the public, he thinks it right not to attempt any correction of many

obvious faults, as such a process, if once entered upon, would inevitably end by robbing the work of any merit of freshness which it may possess. It therefore appears exactly as it did ten years ago, enjoying, in this respect, a considerable advantage over the two individuals (the "Doubles") with whose adventures its pages are mainly concerned, as one of them, at least, regrettfully confesses.

L. W. M. L.

November 1879.

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DOUBLES AND QUILTS.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

"I see by you I am a sweet-faced youth."

—*Comedy of Errors.*

Is it not an accepted article of the popular creed, that no two objects in nature exactly resemble one another?

I am not going to investigate the origin of that belief; I am not going to inquire what laborious wielder of the 'Novum Organum' undertook to establish it; I only ask if we do not regard it as an irrefragable axiom, that Nature, in all her efforts of creative power, from the highest to the lowest, does not repeat herself?

I started in life with this impression. I rejoiced in it. I detest monotony, and here was a high enough sanction for the indulgence of my dislike. I now beg to inform the nobility, gentry, and public in general, that this axiom is a humbug. I denounce it as a fallacy—as a dream dreamed in a fool's paradise (from

which I have been wakened)—as a swindle, a snare, and a delusion, in at least one most important instance. It will be conceded, I presume, that any given man is, to himself at all events, a most important natural object; and therefore, without offending against the laws of modesty, I may say that I myself am the eminent instance in which Nature appears to have deviated from her rule.

If she were to be arraigned on a charge of inconsistency, she might plead that her scheme would fall to the ground if she became monotonous or uniform in any respect.

Let it be granted, for the sake of avoiding argument; but then, why select *me* as the exception? I yield to none in my devotion to her and all her works. She has no fonder or more dutiful son; was it well, was it fitting, then, to make a step-child of me? to exempt me from the privileges common to all her other offspring, and even largely to curtail the value of my personal identity by giving me a “double”?

Some one is sure to say, “What is a ‘double’?” Some people have a nagging and unappeasable thirst for definitions; so, to prevent delay *in limine*, let me at once define him as “a second edition, exact copy, or co-existing counterpart of another man.”

The above-mentioned dogma has hitherto regarded his existence as fabulous—as the myth of the bard or the playful fancy of the dramatist—like the Menæchmi of Plautus, the Dromios and the Antipholi of Shakespeare, the Dioscuri of the ancient classics, *passim*, and the Corsican Brothers of our own Dion Boucicault. But my double individually is an entity

in very truth—a solid prosaic captain of the Heaviest Dragoons, standing six feet and one inch in his stockings, decidedly “inclined to *embonpoint*,” with a florid complexion and Judas-coloured hair, boisterous red whiskers, pale eyes, a gigantic imperial pump-handle nose, a mouth like to a Gothic gargoyle, and a facial angle instantly suggestive of “the companion and the friend of man.”

That is what my double is. Confound him!

Malevolent reader, you are not likely to lose this chance of making “a very palpable hit.” I can hear you say (Oh! “*petulanti splene cachinno*”)—I can hear you say, “Here, then, you have also presented us with your own portrait!”

And I suppose I must sorrowfully admit it. I used to read myself differently, as on this wise,—

“A Captain”—not, O ye gods! a “Heavy”—a Captain of Fusiliers, standing six feet and one inch in my stockings; of a grand, full, military figure; warm, manly complexion; auburn hair; luxuriant ditto whiskers; cold, grey, intellectual eyes; nose large, indeed, but commanding; mouth wide, but gracious; and a forehead expressing a character full of bland and Christian attributes.”

An inner emotion of my soul tells me that the latter is my true description, but the concurrent evidence of many men leads me to believe that, to the grosser vision of the rest of my species, I appear in the former likeness. Perhaps the truth lies somewhere between the two portraits; it is possible that personal enmity may have imparted to the former some dash of caricature, and that a well-grounded

self-esteem may have limned the latter more favourably than is quite consistent with facts ; it is possible, I say, but let it pass.

Robert Burns breathed an infamous aspiration, on behalf of all mankind, that the Powers above might endow them with the faculty of seeing themselves as others see them.

*“Evertere domos totas, optantibus ipsis,
Di faciles.”*

True, but I never commissioned Burns or any one else to prefer such an absurd request. I would that he had left it alone, or spoken for himself.

The gods, however, with a facility which I cannot but deplore, have heard his prayer in my case, so a pleasant dream is dissolved, and I awake a humbled, miserable man.

But keen though the pain of such a disenchantment may be, the possession of a double supplies me with a heavier grievance still.

What I do complain of, and declare to be too intolerably burdensome for human patience, are the perpetual mistakes as to the identity of this man and myself which are made by my most intimate friends and relatives—mistakes that have already landed me in most compromising situations, and involved me in not a few social and domestic imbroglios.

How would you—how would any one of a respectable walk and conversation, with a stake in the country and a character to lose, like things of this sort ?

One day last season, in a London drawing-room where a party was assembled before dinner, seeing a man enter whom I knew very well, and was in the

habit of meeting everywhere, I tried to shake hands with him ; whereupon he (he was an ass, of course) placed his hands ostentatiously behind his back, and elevating his voice so as to attract every one's attention, bawled out,—

“No, sir ! certainly not ; you shan't know me one day and cut me the next ; my name is Baxter” (a slightly irrelevant statement), “and no man shall patronise me.”

“My dear Baxter——” I began.

“Don’t ‘dear Baxter’ me, sir ;” and seeing the idiot was going to make a scene of it before the ladies, I suggested the possibility of a mistake, and the propriety of deferring explanations. During dinner the flaming eyes of Baxter scorched me with looks of scorn and indignation ; and afterwards, when explanations came off, I found I was accused of having brutally cut him in the Park that day, and of having sworn with ferocious expletives that I had never seen him before. Here I proved an *alibi*, and told the sad tale of my double ; but a man can’t spend the whole of his London season proving *alibis* and telling long yarns about his double. Can he ?

There is also a slight inconvenience in such a scene as the following—it ruffles the temper and acts injuriously on the digestive organs :—One day last week I was sauntering up Pall Mall with a couple of friends, quiet and refined men like myself, when we were startled by a loud human bellow from behind, and immediately after I sustained a shock between the shoulders which nearly upset me. Turning round, I found a bearded and perfectly colonial-look-

ing person standing with outstretched paw, and a face full of affectionate recognition, and glowing with tropical if not alcoholic tints. My face was vacant.

"What, Dolly!" the monster roared, clutching my hand. "My own old Dolly-Wallah! It does my heart good to see you—how are all the other jolly old Patagonians?" and with his other paw he began to hammer me about the region of the liver, which with me is a tender organ. "Oh! d-d-d-don't," I cried, doubled up with pain.

"Yes, I will, plumed warrior of Attock! Yes, I will, wild bird of the Mofussil," and he did, heartily.

"D—n it, sir, you must be mad," I gasped.

"As a dancing dervish, mad with joy at seeing old Dolly again. Do you remember the Grampus?" and he went on hammering me.

"No, sir, I don't remember Grampus, or Dolly, or Wolly, or Patagonia, or any of your cursed low friends. It's not my line. You're evidently from India—I never was there. You've got sunstroke, I suppose, or something; but, by Jove, if you don't let my liver alone, I'll call the police!"

There was quite a little crowd by this time, and my quiet and refined friends might be observed in the distance walking rapidly off on the other side of the street.

"Oh! I see," said my assailant, suddenly assuming an air of dignified hauteur, "we're too fine to recognise an indigo-planter in Pall Mall, although we knew the way to his bungalow pretty well in Rohilkund, and didn't mind punishing his brandy-pawnee and cheroots, or borrowing his horses, or calling him

'Jack ;' that was in the North-West Provinces, but here it's another thing—here we must be discreet ; we're in London now, and swells, and we must forget. Oh yes ! we must forget."

"Upon my life, sir, this is too intolerable" (he was gesticulating and talking at the pitch of his voice). "It's quite evident *you* forget yourself. If you're mad, why the deuce don't you go to Hanwell ? If you're drunk, why don't you go and sleep it off ? You've hurt my back and my liver, and you're making a scene in the street with a total stranger ; but, if you don't leave off, I'll give you in charge. I swear I will !"

"Total stranger ! I like that. I suppose you'll tell me next that you're not Captain Burridge of the — Dragoon Guards, you puppy !"

"Yes, I will, you ruffian !" for I was nettled by this time. "I'm not Captain Burridge, and I'm glad of it, if you're a specimen of his friends. But there, see for yourself—there's my card ! For heaven's sake don't follow me !" and I dashed into the Army and Navy Club, and told the porter to give him in charge if he came bothering. From an upper window of the Club I saw the man of indigo leaning for some minutes against the railings of the War Office, and regarding my card with a look of stupefaction.

These two cases may be sufficient to establish the fact that a remarkably strong likeness does exist between this man and me ; but I will add one other, for the truth of which I solemnly vouch—one which will show the reader that the word double is strictly appropriate, and enable him to grasp some conception

of the abominable inconveniences a man so afflicted is likely, nay, certain, to undergo. The first intimation I had of the existence of my "double" was conveyed to me the year before last, in a letter from a brother of mine who was then serving with his regiment in India. My own regiment had been for some time under orders to proceed to the same favoured clime; and my brother, on his return from a six months' expedition in Thibet, during which he had been cut off from all news, expected to find we had arrived. On his way down country the first civilised place he reached was one of the sanatoriums—Nynee Tal, or Simla, or Mussoorie, I forget which ; but whichever it was, its leading hotel possessed a *table d'hôte* to which my brother went for dinner on the day of his arrival.

He had not been long seated when an individual entered the room and took a chair opposite him. This individual (who was no other than the accursed Burridge) my brother at once conceived to be me, whom he had not seen for five years—he had no doubt whatsoever on the subject—but as Burridge merely gave him a glance of perfect non-recognition, he said nothing.

The fact is, my brother and I were both *farceurs* in a small way, and he immediately imagined that I was feigning ignorance of him by way of a joke; and delighted with the idea of foregoing all other human emotion in the cause of mirth, he fell heartily into the humour of the thing ; and though fraternal yearnings turned his gaze now and then in the direction of Burridge, he contrived to make his expression as indifferent and unconscious as possible. At the same

time he could not sufficiently admire my supposed *nonchalance*; for Burridge, being hungry and a plunger, after satisfying his curiosity with one bovine glance round the table, thereafter devoted himself exclusively to his victuals.

Dinner being ended, the company dropped one by one from the room, till at last my brother was left alone with Burridge, who continued to work conscientiously through the dessert. When the door closed on the last person, my brother clapped his hands and loudly shouted, "Bravo! bravo! bravissimo!" Burridge on this put up his eyeglass and stared at him for a second or two with a perfectly stolid countenance, then, dropping his glass, proceeded to attack a fresh mango.

"Bravissimo! bravissimo!" shouted my brother, doubly pleased; "capital! capital! couldn't be better!"

Again Burridge inserted his glass, and slowly remarked, "If it's the dinner you're so pleased with, I can't say much for your taste; in my opinion it's the foulest thing I ever ate in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America."

Again my brother was in ecstasies, but, checking his mirth, he remarked, "Well, but come—enough's as good as a feast; you've carried that game quite far enough; don't you think you had better stop it now?"

Again the eyeglass was inserted, and the plunger spoke,—

"Oh! the proprietor, I suppose; well, it would take a good deal of this kind of *enough* to make a

feast. But look here, if I pay you your contract price, I've a right to eat as much as ever I please: and I'll tell you what it is, I'll just serve you out. I'll eat your whole dessert, if I have cholera for it; and I'll ring for more if I'm alive when this is done."

"Come, come," said my brother, "no more humbug. How's the governor?"

"What governor?" said Burridge, in great astonishment.

"My governor, of course."

"Don't believe you ever had one," was the scornful reply; and he ate on.

"Tut, tut, man! how's the old lady?"

"I sincerely hope she's dead," said Burridge, sucking away imperturbably.

"Oh, Donald, you parricidal ruffian! where are your natural affections?" and he playfully threw an over-ripe mango at the dragoon, which took effect upon his chin and burst over his white waistcoat. Thereupon a terrible scene ensued; the phlegm of the plunger gave way to ungovernable fury, and he overwhelmed my brother with handfuls of fruit, plates, glasses, knives, and whatever came to hand. The row alarmed the whole establishment, and Burridge was with difficulty overpowered. Eventually an explanation took place, and my brother was, though with some difficulty, convinced. They immediately became great friends (I fear my brother's tastes are rather low), and he afterwards saved Burridge from falling over a "cud." I don't know whether that is the right spelling, and I'm not quite sure that I know what a "cud" is, but I believe it to

be a kind of precipice in the Himalayas over which picnic parties appear to have an unfortunate habit of losing their lives. Be that as it may, my brother somehow saved his life in connection with a "cud," and I, for my part, can't say I think the better of him for it.

I have now mentioned three of these cases of mistaken identity, and I think they are sufficient, though, if necessary, instead of three I could adduce three hundred ; and every day at this present writing brings large additions to the list.

Burridge has a large acquaintance apparently, and on an average day in the height of the season I should say I cut about a dozen of them who insist on bowing to me. I too have a large acquaintance, so it may be presumed that Burridge's average daily bag approaches the same dimensions as my own. Our respective lists, therefore, must be rapidly diminishing, owing to the impracticability of establishing an *alibi* to every one who is cut by one's double. I find that Burridge (who is excessively indignant at the mistakes, on the ground, I understand, that his personal beauty and *ton* are superior to mine—ha! ha!), in cutting my acquaintances, contrives, by the way he does so, to leave behind very rancorous feelings—so much so that many are too angry to entertain the idea of an *alibi* or any other basis of explanation ; so I now make a point of cutting his people as offensively as possible, mowing them down with a trenchant sneer, or blighting them with the incredulous astonishment of a wintry eye. It is war to the knife between us now—a war of reprisals, and, I sus-

pect, of extermination, as far as our visiting lists are concerned. At the beginning of the season, when Burridge returned from Patagonia or the Mofussil, or whencesoever he did return, and when, consequently, the distressing inconvenience I have, I fear, been too long dwelling upon, began first to be felt, I sent an envoy to him to see if we could not come to some arrangement to obviate the inconvenience of these mistakes. My representative (who was filled with zeal rather than with discretion, and who was, moreover, of a bullying and autocratic turn of mind) pointed out to Burridge that, as he was the latest comer, in a Park-going point of view, I was clearly entitled to consider myself the aggrieved party, and to call upon him to make any sacrifice that might be necessary to restore our respective identities to a proper footing. He then suggested that Burridge should shave his whiskers off, which was declined: that he should adopt blue spectacles; no, he wouldn't. Well, then, a blue eyeglass; certainly not. That he should wear perpetual mourning, or a white hat with a black band, or become notorious by walking about with an alpenstock, or carrying a kitten or a squirrel on his shoulder wherever he went. No, he would agree to nothing of the sort. "Well then," said my envoy, "there's only one thing for it—we can't have you in town at all during the season; you must go and cricket or fish somewhere—say Cornwall or Norway—during May, June, and July. I daresay we can spare you the last week in July, provided you avoid the Park and the Opera." Burridge, who is evidently unreasonable, hereupon drove my envoy

from his presence with language unfit for publication ; and from that day Burridge eyes me and I eye Burridge as Saul eyed David.

CHAPTER II.

“*Gaudeo edepol, si quid propter me tibi evenit boni.
Nam illa cum te ad se vocabat me esse creditit.*”

—PLAUTUS, *Menæch.*

The preceding pages were written a good many years ago, and the events therein related are separated by an interval of five years from those which belong to the narrative I now propose to lay before the public. They were written, it will be seen, at a time when I was smarting under the annoyance of feeling that my identity was almost shared by another man. Why I wrote them has now escaped my recollection. It may have been that they were intended as the introduction to a series of papers, wherein were to be duly chronicled the various *contretemps* and untoward events which seemed likely to arise from the startling resemblance between Burridge and myself; perhaps with the wild hope of a vain youth who wished the eyes of all London to be upon him, of advertising the public thoroughly of the existence of the double identity, and thereby of that half of the identity which belonged to himself; thus salving his *amour propre* wounded by the previous mistakes, by making himself notable in this somewhat ignoble

way. It may be so; we know how sweet the “monstrari digito” is to many minds, and what devices are resorted to to procure the feeblest little tootle upon the smallest of Fame’s penny trumpets; but it is now immaterial why they were written. Suffice it that here they are, ready to my hand, and that I am going to prefix them as an explanatory introduction to the narrative of the remarkable chain of circumstances to which, after being lost sight of and forgotten for a good many years, this singular resemblance has more recently given rise, influencing in a manner as singular as the likeness itself the destinies of my double and myself. Little did I think when I used to pass Captain Burridge in the Park, or encounter him in the “Zoologicals,” with a fixed eye and erected crest—little did I think that one day I should be—, but pshaw! I must not anticipate.

I accompanied my rich aunt (widow of a rich City maternal uncle,—for though a Scotchman I will be moderate enough to own that I have *some* City blood) one evening, two or three seasons ago, to the opera, and having established her and myself in the stalls which she had selected at Mitchell’s, after half an hour’s deliberation and discussion with that long-suffering man, I proceeded to take the usual survey of the house, in quest of friends or notables worthy of observation. My aunt, I must explain, was in the habit of visiting the opera once annually, but these annual occasions were for her grand festas and gala nights, and she entered upon each with the avowed intention of “getting her pennyworth.” In this ex-

pression was implied not so much a full swing of musical enjoyment; to this, I fear, she was indifferent, except when her ear recognised some air with which the interpreting organ-grinder had familiarised her in making hideous the Bromptonian day and night. "Getting her pennyworth" implied the largest possible gratification of her social rather than of her musical tastes; it implied the earliest possible arrival and the latest possible departure; it implied the selection of a night when there was likely to be a full and brilliant house, with its fine toilettes and diamonds, grandes, lions, heroes and heroines of burning scandals, ministers, foreign princes, and other pomps and vanities which need not be recounted. But another essential element in her pennyworth was a good-natured cicerone, who either knew or pretended to know about everybody and everything in the house, and who, proof against the indignant "Hush! hush!" of the audience, didn't mind administering, in the midst of the most thrilling passages, honeyed potions of fashionable intelligence to the worthy old soul. If she had a predominating weakness (and who has not?) it was for the upper ten thousand. It was rapture to her to gaze upon them, their finery and their equipages; their titles of distinction were music in her ears; and stray anecdotes of what went on in their charmed circle were to her sacred and awful as revelations from an unapproachable paradise. Foolish of the old creature; but was she not a matron of the British middle class? Can the leopard change his spots? From my position as her nephew, I was pretty often in charge on these occasions; and as I found that

my advance in her good graces was in a direct ratio with the number of people I could explain to her, the number of spicy bits of gossip I could *apropos* retail, and the number of swells with whom I appeared to be on a footing of acquaintance, I took care that my relative should in this respect get her pennyworth, even at some sacrifice of veracity on my part. I fear, indeed, I must confess that I took a mischievous pleasure in playing upon her huge faculty of wonder and reverence for the aristocracy, and in making her simple honest eyes distend in delighted astonishment.

On this occasion the good lady was in great force. "Donald! Donald!" she exclaimed in a hoarse whisper, shortly after we were seated, "who is that young lady in green, with red hair, flirting with the disgusting painted old reprobate up there? don't you see?—second tier."

"Where?—ah! yes, of course; don't *you* know them?" (surprisedly).

"No, I don't."

"Ah! odd you don't; why that's old Colonel Whistlebones, you know, and that's *the* fair one; you know what I mean *now*, of course;" and I looked at my aunt with a certain look which silenced her, partly because she was ashamed to be behind the fast scandal of the day, and partly because she was satisfied with the knowledge that there *was* a bad story which she would get out of me at another time.

"I don't see many acquaintances here," went on the old lady, sweeping her telescopes round the grand tier; "it's very odd."

Considering the part of the house she was focussing,

in connection with her name and place of abode (Blogg and a shady part of Brompton), I own I did not share her surprise.

"Come, Donald," she continued, "tell me about the people up there—the grand folks, I mean. Ah! who was that you bowed to just now?" I had executed a very correct salam to the pillar which divided the two most brilliant boxes in the house.

"Oh! I bowed to the whole party," I replied, carelessly; "know them all."

"Do you?" screamed the old lady, in deep delight; "and pray who is the old dowager with the hawk's beak and false teeth?"

"Hush! my dear aunt, for heaven's sake! that's the great Scotch Duchess—the arbitress of fashion. I'm astonished" (rather disgustedly) "*you* don't know her!"

"Oh! that's *her*," cried my aunt, as if my answer had conveyed a world of intelligence; "and *you* know *her*?"

"Yes, of course" (pettishly); "why not, pray?"

"Oh! don't be cross, Donald; I'm very glad, I'm sure," and the poor old creature looked it.

"These girls are—at least that one who shook her fan at me, is her daughter."

"Shook her fan at you! I never saw it. You must be very intimate."

"Tut, tut, aunt; how serious you are about trifles! That's Bismarck just come into the box opposite, wearing the eagle; he's been dining at Rothschild's, I know;" and I fixed my eyes on a saturnine and stock-jobbing-looking person who entered at the moment, wearing a huge red camellia in his button-hole.

"Bismarck! Rothschild! eagle!" shrieked my aunt, half rising. "Where are they?"

I felt that I had evoked a rather unmanageable demon, and amidst quite a hum of laughter I induced my aunt to sit down, and the overture began.

The performance proceeded, and I became engrossed in the music, and lost to everything else, except a vaguely-irritated consciousness that my aunt's head was in a state of perpetual oscillation, and that her glasses were being worked with as many changes of position as a battery of horse-artillery in a general action. She was quiet, however, which was a mercy.

The moment the first act ended, she burst out,— "Now, Donald, do tell me who that pretty creature is —close by there; she's evidently a friend of yours, and a very particular one, judging by the way she's been looking at you, and trying to catch your eye. Who is she? She's bowing."

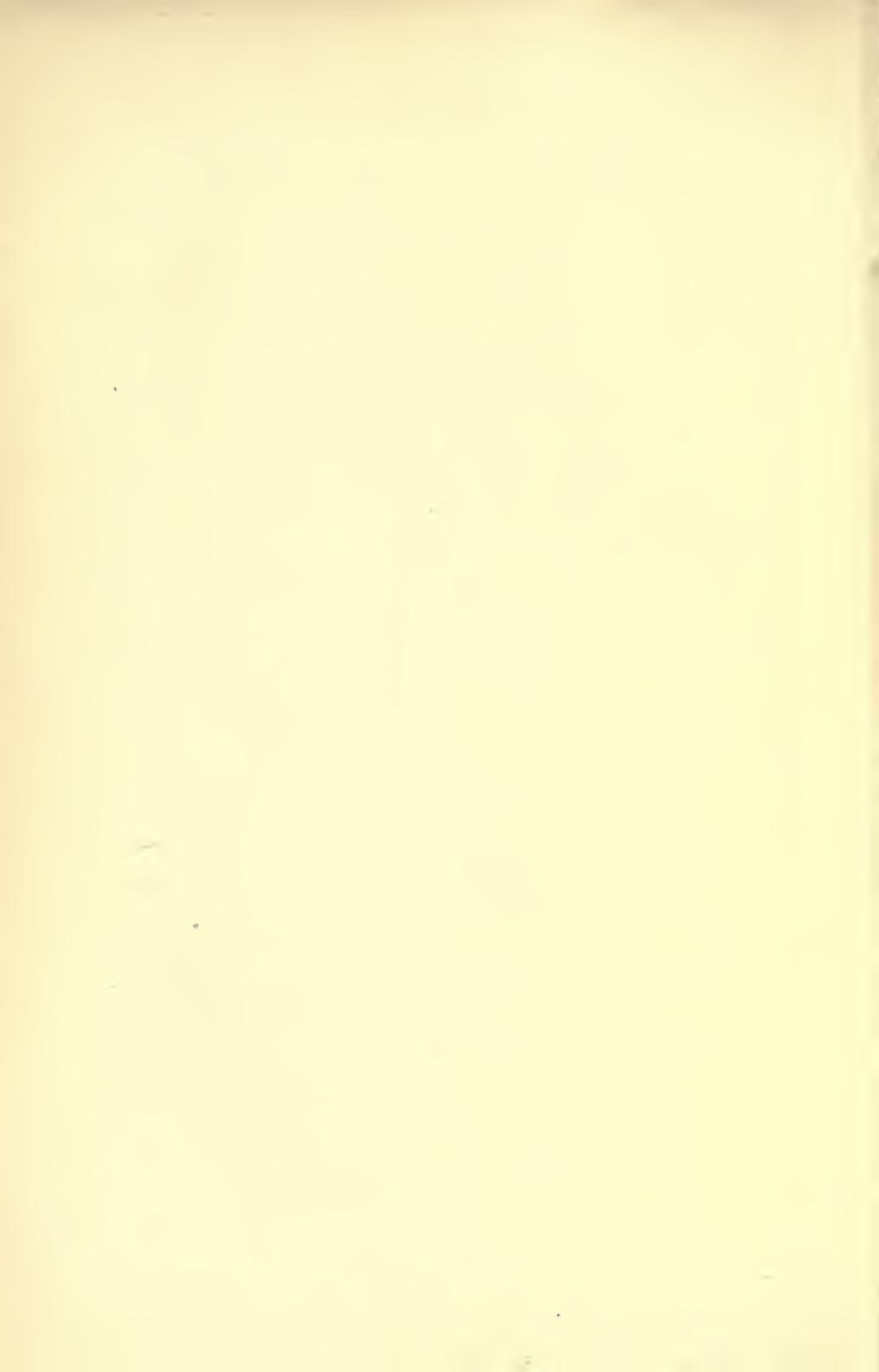
Still engrossed with musical thoughts, I answered at random, and looking straight before me, but with the instinct of my office as eicerone,— "Oh! that's Lady Eva Tressilian—a very nice girl."

"Lady Eva Tressilian! upon my word, Mr Donald, you seem to be getting on in the world; nothing but lords and ladies. How pleased your dear uncle would have been! But I always said your proper sphere was in high society. Why don't you look at her? She's ogling you again."

I woke from my reverie, and turned my head in the direction of my aunt's gaze, and there, sure enough, in the second row from us, and almost in front, was a young lady, to all appearance, as my aunt said, ogling



"Who is she? She's bowing"



me tremendously. As my eyes met hers, her expression became something more than one of mere friendly recognition, and with an ineffable smile she slowly bowed her beautiful head. No doubt of it! Great heavens! what was this? Perhaps she had a cast in her eye, and was bowing to some one behind; perhaps she was a juvenile acquaintance suddenly grown into womanhood; perhaps—horror of horrors—perhaps she was a “horse-breaker!” These thoughts flitted like lightning through my mind as I felt that her face (and a very beautiful face it was) was unknown to me. But here was my aunt, to whom I had inadvertently announced her as the Lady Eva Tressilian, sitting by my side, panting to see the impressive salutation (which was now repeated) of a female aristocrat returned by her nephew. There was nothing for it, then, but to return the greeting with as much impressiveness as I dared. I did so, my face blazing with guilt and shame. These symptoms were observed and misinterpreted by my aunt. She emitted a low chuckle, and nudged me with her elbow (the vulgar old harridan!) Already her active mind was, doubtless, weaving a little romance, ending with a marriage in high life—a Gothic chapel—a corpulent archbishop, and a medieval duke handing over to her nephew—the nephew of Mrs Blogg of Brompton—this beautiful fragment of the upper crust.

The next act proceeded. I tried to rivet my attention on the stage, and on the music; that failing, I endeavoured to interest myself in all sorts of calculations and speculations—the exact spot at which the first tenor’s false calf began; what it was made of,

where it was made, what it cost ; whether false calves are made to suit different parts,—for instance, whether there is a lover's calf and a villain's calf and a warrior's calf ; then, why that part of the human body should be called a calf at all. Pshaw ! it was of no use. A magnetic attraction would draw my eyes in the direction of "Lady Eva," and as surely as I looked towards her, so surely did she, sitting half *en profile*, inform herself of the circumstance, with the tail of her eye apparently, and gently, quietly, half turn her head, and favour me with one of those wistful ineffable glances which I cannot describe, but which would, I daresay, have been very pleasant if I had not felt that somehow or other I was defrauding her out of them. They were stolen waters, yet not sweet. My aunt kept registering each glance with a nudge and a chuckle ; her head ceased to oscillate ; her eyes were glued to the chignon of the "Lady Eva." At the end of the last act but one, to free myself from the spell, I fairly rose up, and, to the disgust of my aunt, turning my back on the stage and on the enchantress, affected to survey the audience with interest. My aunt rose too ; and although conscious that her previous eccentricities and somewhat wild appearance were making her the cynosure of eyes, I preferred this to remaining under fire from the front, and to possible discovery and exposure as an impostor, or something worse, by "Lady Eva's" friends.

It was indeed a very probable and likely explanation of her first bow that she mistook me for some one else ; but it was beyond any kind of probability that the subsequent and continuous battery of glances

could be intended for any one about whose identity she could make any mistake. They were intended for me—*me ipsum*—in *proprietà personalē* therefore; and what then? While I was thus meditating, my sleeve was touched by a gentleman in front, and he handed me a little three-cornered note. “Passed to me from the row in front,” he said ; and as I turned to thank him, my eyes met those of “Lady Eva,” which told me two things—that the note came from her, and that it was to be treated clandestinely. The transaction, for a wonder, escaped the lynx eyes of aunt Blogg, and I was able when we sat down, by placing the billet in the bottom of my hat, to read it undetected. It was addressed—

“CAPTAIN B——”

So! there was no mistake. (I believe I have forgotten to introduce myself as Captain Donald Bruce.) It ran thus :—

“At Aldershot? My uncle has invited you for Thursday. If you can trust yourself to come *as a stranger*, come, for this death in life of never never meeting kills me. Give me a little confidential nod if you *are* at Aldershot, and try not to be angry at this indiscretion of, dear angel, your PARROQUET.”

Now, what the deuce did all this mean ? Was this young person a practical joker—a Theodore Hook in petticoats ? or was the aviary from which this parroquet had escaped a lunatic asylum, or what ?

She knew me, evidently—knew my movements—Aldershot, and so on; but how? And how in the name of wonder did I come to be her “angel”?—I who, to the best of my belief, had never set eyes on her before? And then the idea of my being any one’s angel!—there was some fun in that—ha! ha! for I was not a lady’s man—in fact, ladies detested me. Odd, perhaps, but they did. In Montreal they called me the “Caledonian bore,” and in Plymouth, “Ursa Major.” I was too sincere and dignified for them, I used to think, and couldn’t condescend to small talk, and they didn’t appreciate me; but I didn’t mind—rather liked it, in fact—and I was left alone and allowed to follow my own tastes, which induced me to prefer the society of Blackstock of ours (widower, and from the ranks), and to pass my evening in talking shop with him over a sensible pipe of cavendish and a quiet glass of grog, rather than to go dressing up in mufti after mess, and dangling about in the ball-rooms of garrison towns, with the off-chance of enjoying one thirty-sixth share in the society of the one (for there never is more than one) passable girl of the place. No; that sort of nonsense didn’t suit me. I wasn’t a marrying man—never had been in love in my life, and never meant to be. I was wedded to my sword, had laid my heart on the altar of my country, and that sort of thing; so the idea of my being the private angel of this or any other young female was a trifle too good—ha! ha! How old Blackstock would laugh, to be sure! And her uncle, whose hospitable intentions were here announced—who was he? And “if I could *trust myself* to meet her as a stranger.”

Well, without an overweening self-confidence, that appeared to be a matter of no great difficulty—ha! ha! At these thoughts grimly smiling, I raised my head, and there was her ladyship at it again—“on the ogle,” as Artemus Ward would have said. She elevated her eyebrows interrogatively; and I—what else could I do?—gave her the “confidential little nod,” thereby admitting that at present I did hail from Aldershot. Two elderly ladies were with her, and a young lad—a most unexceptionably respectable-looking party; and the pretty girl herself, despite her eyeing manœuvres, was an artless, innocent-looking creature, to all appearance sane and incapable of practical joking.

Perhaps in some previous state of existence the Parroquet and I had known and loved each other, and it was given to her alone to preserve the memory of our passion; perhaps I was asleep and dreaming. I would pinch myself and try; and I was just going to do so when the husky voice of my aunt hissed into my ear, in accents of consternation, “Donald, *did* you hear me order a lobster?” and saved me the trouble. At this moment the Parroquet and party rose and left the house, my aunt digging away at my ribs with all her might to call attention to the fact. I kept my eyes on the stage, however, drawing from my relative the angry remark, that “she wondered her ladyship” (ha! ha!) “would trouble to look at such a mannerless goose.” She was in a flutter of delight, though, and I felt that if I had been placed in a compromising position with regard to “Lady Eva,” I was in a much more favourable one with my aunt (testamentarily

speaking) than when the evening began. After all, then, it was over. I could make nothing of it, so what was the good of puzzling? Some fellows would have understood it, no doubt, but I didn't. I didn't understand women, nor they me; so, hang it! I would think no more of the matter; and I dismissed the subject,—although, by the way, I had to draw awfully on my imagination to satisfy my aunt as we struggled *tête-à-tête* with the lobster, which had *not* been forgotten.

The duties of my profession took me back to Aldershot, where my regiment was then quartered, next evening. Now the great majority of fellows—I mean average military fellows—would no doubt have wasted many succeeding days in prowling about Farnham, Farnborough, Sandhurst, Tongham, and their dependencies, in search of that mysterious bird the Parroquet, hunting, as Milton did, for the errant damosel who found him asleep under the greenwood tree, and who (stopping short, it is to be hoped, of the freedom which Diana took with Endymion under similar circumstances) placed on his breast a sonnet laudatory of his veiled eyes, and inspired him, as the story goes, when all his huntings were in vain, with some shadowy idea of a lost Paradise; but I did nothing of the sort. Blackstock and I guffawed discreetly over the adventure on the night of my return, but very shortly dismissed it in favour of a capital new theory which he had started about the true position of the left heels of rear-rank men in the act of loading, which we agreed might probably lead to his professional advancement; and so I thought no more

about the matter, life being, in my opinion, too short to bother one's self about mysteries that cannot be solved by twenty minutes' good close thinking, which I had already squandered on the subject. Wedded to my profession as I then was, and taking an absorbed interest even in its minutest details, Aldershot was to me an Elysium. I fear it is not so to the present race of officers; but there is a good time coming; and now that men of the large military experience of Mr Trevelyan have taken the army in hand, a great regeneration is to be looked for. But to me, even in that pre-Trevelyan era, Aldershot was Elysium, the Long Valley as delectable as Tempe's pleasant vale; and Eelmoor Common, like Rosherville Gardens, "the only place to spend a happy day." It had one immense advantage for a man who, like me, wished to immerse himself in professional avocations, that there he was free from the social interruptions which belong to most other country quarters. At Aldershot soldiers are a drug in the market, an eyesore and a nuisance to the neighbourhood; and besides, any one who took to the promiscuous entertainment of such a host would find his time pretty well occupied, and his banker's balance somewhat impaired by the process.

"Yes, here," I used to think, exultingly, "one is at last free from the perpetual nuisance of civilian society."

But an officious friend of mine—the vicar of our parish—on hearing that I was going to sojourn at the camp, had insisted on sending a letter of introduction on my behalf to a friend of his who had a

villa on the outskirts of F——, only a few miles off. The result was an unsuccessful attempt on the part of Mr Lewis (the friend) to make my acquaintance by calling upon me, and before I had time to return the civility, he invited me to dine with him at his residence, Carysfort Villa. The day of the dinner-party was in the end of the week succeeding that in which befell my romantic adventure at the opera; and though I hated and detested alien and promiscuous feeding, I had felt bound, out of respect for my clerical friend, to accept the invitation. When the day arrived, Jack Leslie, my subaltern—the privileged wag, cool hand, and odd fish of the regiment—offered to drive me over to F—— in his dog-cart, and bring me back at night. Jack was a fellow cursed with a paradoxical sort of laziness, which induced him to take any amount of trouble to avoid an act of routine. He liked nothing so much as shirking mess; but as the authorities regarded this proclivity of his with disfavour, he was always glad to get an excuse of some sort for indulging in it. On this occasion, when he said, “Hang it, it’s too hot to be bothered dressing for mess to-night, and sitting a hot hour and a half in the mess-tent! I’ll tool you over to F——, drop you at your eating-place, go on to the inn, dine quietly, and pick you up when the feast is over; and I’ll take my key-bugle with me, and have a jolly good practice in the inn garden, where no one can object.” When he said this, it was clearly not my part to throw stones at Jack’s little peculiarities (I having no conveyance of my own); so I gladly accepted his offer, and in due time we were *en route*.

CHAPTER III.

"There is a fat friend in your master's house
That kitchened me for you to-day at dinner."

—*Comedy of Errors.*

"Where does the old bloke live?" inquired Jack, as we entered the outskirts of the place.

"Oh! somewhere hereabouts—one of these villas we're coming to; the name is sure to be painted on the gate in big letters: drive slow, and we'll hit it off."

St John Villa, Palmerston House, Derby Vale, Cambridge Cottage, were all passed successively, the names duly blazoned, as I had surmised. "Go on, Jack; that's Carlisle Villa—I want Carysfort," said I, as he pulled up at the first-named house.

Driving slowly along, and scanning all the gate-posts, we arrived at last opposite a house of much more imposing size than its neighbours. It stood back from the road only a very short distance, however; and its pleasaunce, laid out in flower-beds and studded with rare shrubs, was separated from the public way by a low iron ornamental fence, clustered with creepers. A party of gentlemen in evening dress and without hats were lounging round the door; and as we came in sight, a stout elderly party, bald, rubicund, and white-waistcoated, came quickly to the gate, waving his hand, and inviting our approach.

"This way, Captain," he cried, in a rich port-winy

voice—"this way. Glad to see you—come in—mind that post, and keep off the turf—there!"

We pulled up in front of the door, and I, descending, was warmly shaken hands with by the host, who rattled on with extraordinary volubility—"Warm weather, awful! aint it? so we're receiving *al fresco*, as the Italians say, you see; and I did suggest to Jemima that we should dine *al fresco* too, under that big walnut-tree; couldn't be more comfortable, could we? but women are obstinate! She wouldn't have it—afraid of insects and the public gaze. Public gaze, forsooth! damme! I aint ashamed of my guests or my dinner, I said. But bless me! it's dinner-time—how about your trap? you can put up here, and your man can have his dinner, and all that. Take" (to Jack) "the trap round to the back, my man, by the left there, past the dog-kennel, and tell the coachman to make you all right."

This was a dig for Jack, whose excessively horsy attire not unnaturally led to the mistake. I explained, however, that I had a message for the town, and that "my fellow" would go on and stable at the inn.

"Very well, very well—do as you please; plenty of stabling, if you like; but—ah! walk in, gentlemen—walk in. You know your way—walk in, and walk up to the drawing-room. I knew you at once, Captain, although I'm sure I don't know when I saw you before. It was only once, I think—at old what-d'yecall-'em's; but you handsome dogs, you see, you make an impression—hey? ha! ha!—and when I saw you looking about at the gates, I said to myself, 'Here he is, and no mistake.' You've been all over the

world since we met, I've no doubt, fighting the battles of your Queen and—eh? here's the drawing-room. Jemima, here's the Captain—my friend the Captain; you never saw him before, I think."

A correspondingly stout and benign lady answered to the name of Jemima, and came forward to welcome me.

"I'm delighted to see you," she said; "our good friends told us you *were* to be at Aldershot, and without being actually certain that you were there now, we wrote on chance to ask you to join our little party, and I'm so glad we've been so fortunate."

There was a large party in the room of ladies and gentlemen, to several of whom I was introduced, and specially to a lovely creature, to whom the host presented me, styling her "My niece, Lady Rose O'Shea." He had evidently forgotten my name, and was hazy about my antecedents, and introduced me in a very general way as "My friend the Captain from Aldershot." I could not be surprised at this. His bee-like manner of fluttering from subject to subject made it unlikely that he should remember anything, except in a general way. Probably it was a triumph that he had grasped the idea that I *was* a captain, and from Aldershot, for he insisted a good deal upon it.

"Well, well, well!" he said, "time and tide wait for no man, no more should dinner, eh? ha! ha! and dinner's ready these ten minutes, but there's somebody wanting, I know; there are only twenty-four here, and we dine twenty-five: who's amissing? I say, Jemima, who is it? Ah! I see; as usual, it's that

cat Polly. But talk of the devil—eh? here she is; the late Miss Polly; ha! ha! Now come away, my Lady Rose, take your old uncle's arm; and Jemima, you and the Captain from Aldershot will form up the parade, and march on the commissariat department: come away, my Lady—ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!" and he went braying and guffawing out of the room.

The "cat Polly's" entrance may have been a subject of mere gastronomic interest to the rest of the party; to me it was somewhat more, being, in fact, as tremendous and startling as if a bomb-shell had descended through the roof into the drawing-room of Carysfort Villa. The "cat Polly," in a word, was no other than the Lady Eva Tressilian—the Parroquet of my opera-house adventure. There was the same look as her eyes met mine for an instant,—not a look of surprise—she evidently expected me—but a look of—well, I'll call it fond but furtive interest. I was not presented to her, and had no time for reflection or astonishment, for the hostess began to make her dispositions of the march.

"Dear me, dear me," said the vulgar but hearty old soul, "who's to take who? I don't know. Mr King, will you take Mrs Hicks? No, that won't do. Mr Thomson, will *you* take Mrs Hicks? Dear, dear! that's not it either. Captain, will you take my niece, Miss Richmond? But ah! you're to take me—I remember *that*. Oh! do somebody take somebody. Badger will be furious!"

The old lady appeared to be in a regular muddle, and not foreseeing much prospect of a move, I sug-

gested laughingly that the ladies should go out first, unescorted, and the gentlemen after—an idea which was gratefully received and acted upon, the honour of conducting the hostess, however, continuing to me.

"It's a good plan that of yours," she said.

"Yes, it saves trouble; *we* always do it at Court—borrowed it originally from Constantinople, I believe," said I, dropping instinctively from the style of the woman into the vein which had such a potent effect on aunt Blogg.

"Indeed! and very sensible—quite what I would expect of her Majesty. You see my husband is a great stickler for what he calls precedence. It wasn't always the way with him, but ever since his sister married into high life he's taken to it—says it's the right thing, and must be done; and he is very troublesome, I assure you. Whenever we have a dinner-party he gives me so many lectures and instructions and directions that my head gets quite addled, that it does, just like it was now, and I can remember nothing—whether an alderman goes before a rector, or a sheriff before a lawyer, or what not; but he can't be angry when he hears it's Court fashion." And so we entered the room, the lady screaming out, apologetically, "It's the Court fashion, Badger; the Captain's always there, and he says it's their rule: and what's good for the goose is good for the gander, so don't you scold me."

"Tut, tut, tut, Jemima! who ever heard me scold? But find your places, ladies and gentlemen—shake together somehow; there's turtle, mind, and it don't

eat well iced, although we drink iced punch with it, eh? ha! ha!"

The process of shaking together was a matter of some time. Ladies plumped down together in coveys, and gentlemen followed suit; wives got next husbands, and brothers next sisters; guests mistook portly waiters for honoured guests, and politely offered them the *pas*, and so on. On the whole the system as practised at the Courts of London and Stamboul was not on this occasion a success; but at last we got seated. Half-way down the table, on the opposite side, sat the "cat Polly."

Consuming my turtle, I reviewed the situation. It was baffling. Who the deuce was the "cat Polly"? She knew I was coming here—this must be the occasion to which she had alluded in her note, on which I was to make an effort to conduct myself like a stranger. My host, Mr Lewis, then, must be her uncle. It was surely quite impossible that I could once have known her, and— pshaw! impossible. I was rather surprised, too, at the style of people who were my entertainers. They were not what I had expected from the description of my introducer, the old vicar at home, who had spoken of them as "his dear and early quiet friends, who would be happy to give me at least a warm welcome in their frugal home." Mrs Lewis, too, had invited me in a half-apologetic way; said there would be "no party, no inducements, and hoped that a hearty welcome might compensate for 'simple fare and other deficiencies.'" But this was not my idea of a frugal home; a table blazing with plate—turtle soup—half a score of servants—more

than a score of guests—all this could scarcely be described as “no party, simple fare, and other deficiencies;” and as for quietness, that rollicking, blatant, babbling old party at the foot of the table, how could he be called a quiet man? or his wife—could *she*? and Badger—what the deuce did that mean when the man’s name was Lewis? A term of endearment probably, but an oddish one to be shouted down a forty-feet room by a quiet woman to her quiet husband. Thus puzzling, I consumed my turtle and sipped my punch; but when these were disposed of and I found myself still in the dark, I dismissed speculation. I acted on my usual principle, which said, “If you ever do stumble on a moment or two worth living for, give yourself all to them while they last—‘cras ingens iterabimus aequor.’” Here were some moments worth living for—gastronomically at least—so I yielded myself to the joys of the Sybarite, wreathed me a garland of the vine, decked the bald front of Father Time with roses—that is, dipped boldly into the very dry champagne of Badger-Lewis, toyed with undeniable *entrées*, grappled with the inevitable haunch, conversed slightly with Mrs Badger, and from time to time, emboldened by that which maketh glad the heart of man, contrary to my usual custom, let my eyes go roving down the table, till they rested on a face and a pair of eyes—which—which—the like of which—tut, tut!—which appeared to me to have more attractive power than any I had previously encountered. “Ah! the *Parroquet!*” I hear you say. Shrewdly put, but incorrect. True it is that my roving glances were perpetually inter-

cepted—"fielded," as it were, by that "pervigil ales"—but their real destination was the Lady Rose O'Shea who sat beyond.

Dinner went on, and a good dinner it was all through. The company was by no means so *recherché* as the viands were: it was in some instances nondescript, but the prevailing flavour was certainly of the Stock Exchange. There was indeed not a little vulgarity, but it was a hearty, joyous vulgarity, suggestive of exuberant animal spirits and much physical power. The champagne was in rivers. The bottles were invariably opened in the dining-room, and the sound of their explosions mingled with the roar of ever-increasing talk, with the crash of teeth, with the jingling of knives, with the clink of glasses; their corks ricochetted from the cornices and played fitfully on the features of the guests. Everywhere the improvised waiter lurched dangerously about on his mission of destruction, bumping occiputs with sharp-cornered dishes, and embellishing silk, satin, and broadcloth with buttery cauliflower and glutinous sauce. The "hall was filled with steam of flesh," and the guests fed "like horses when you hear them feed." As for the laughter, it was that unquenched laughter of the immortals when they lie beside their nectar and shake their ambrosial curls. It was an Olympus of revelling City gods, over whom Badger-Lewis beamed presidential—Jupiter Opt. Max.

Somewhat incongruously placed in this scene of unsophisticated delights were the graceful forms of the two ladies to whom my attention had been especially directed—the two ladyships—the real Lady Rose and

the spurious Lady Eva. No doubt beauty and grace could scarcely have found better foils for their attractions than this festive board afforded, surrounded as it was with the distending forms and gulose features of these gormandising men of scrip. But their beauty required no foil, no softening medium of an atmosphere misty with the spray of sparkling wine. Gems of purest water are independent of adventitious enhancement, and each of these girls was a gem in her own way. Mrs Badger-Lewis was hungry, and I may add thirsty, and the preoccupation of ministering to these wants, combined with a slight poverty in conversational topics, kept her silent, and left me leisure to observe the humours of the scene. I have said before that I was not a lady's man; but here, to-day, whether from a subtle pleasure in contemplating incongruities, or that my art-nature (for I am a bit of an artist) was mysteriously worked upon by some proportional harmony in the facial lines of the girl, I could not then decide, but certain it is that I stared horribly at Lady Rose. It assuredly was not strange (under the circumstances) that the Lady Eva should attract my regards, as she did from time to time; but the other fascination—*that* was beyond the region of my experiences. And there was something else that puzzled me; it was that in the occasional return-glances of Lady Rose I could not but observe a certain intelligence, by no means like that of the Parroquet,—a look in which curiosity, disapprobation, and amusement struggled for the mastery. I think it is an extremely difficult matter to delineate by word-painting the niceties of female beauty, and I approach

the task of describing these two ladies with a humble consciousness of my own inadequacy to do them justice. I am sadly destitute of the technical jargon which is part of the stock-in-trade of those who unfold tales bearing upon matters erotic. Pathetic eyelashes, Madonna mouths, married brows, swimming eyes, impossible combinations of non-existing tints, and the mysterious terms of physiognomical architecture—these are machineries I know not how to work. I suppose the reader would not be satisfied if I was simply to say that they were both “ineffably beautiful” in their respective styles of dark and fair? Very well, then, I will give my own “outsider’s” view of the two nymphs as they sat at meat among the satyrs.

The Parroquet was what I have heard ladies call a “professed beauty”—by which they appear to mean, not that the lady to whom the term is applied merely thinks herself or “sets up” for a beauty, but that her charms are of that undeniably stamp which it baffles even envy to explain away. Her figure was tall and graceful, her head small, beautifully set on and carried; her lovely face devoid of the coldness and insipidity which so often belong to features of what I believe to be called the Grecian type. What face could be wanting in expression when adorned with such eyes? dark blue as the sky on a summer night, and brilliant as its stars, and with that look of slumbering fire (as if they *could* look *such* things) that is hardly ever seen combined with a fair complexion; and Polly’s skin was beautifully fair, and her hair bright as a golden harvest-field. Is that enough? No—her dress. Ah! her dress. I can say nothing more

about it than that it was pink, and that her head was crowned with a chaplet of large white daisies ; and so much for the Parroquet.

The Lady Rose I can much less easily describe. Somehow my gaze seemed to lose itself so hopelessly in the pellucid depths of a pair of soft brown eyes, that I could scarcely get it back to observe anything else. Soft brown eyes ! does that describe them ? is that enough ? No, they were something more ; the rays of light seemed to fall lovingly upon them, and form over them a sort of lustrous veil—a softening medium through which a pure spirit within might gaze upon the world and see but half its deformity. These eyes monopolised my attention so much on this occasion, that I only carried away, besides, an impression of a sweet and merry smile, frequently displaying the finest teeth in the world ; of two mischievous dimples in cheeks that bloomed like her namesakes the roses ; of a great wealth of dark auburn hair ; and of a figure not tall, but light and airy as Titania's. And now for that confounded millinery ! Well, make the most of a white muslin dress and a wreath of green oak-leaves. “Sapienti sit satis.”

The fixing on my mind of these impressions, such as they were, was not to be achieved by a slight inspection ; and the rage of her hunger and her thirst being appeased at length, my hostess, glad probably to find a topic on which she was at home, began to rally me with elephantine badinage on my continued scrutiny of the two young ladies.

“I wish you had made a better dinner,” she began. “I’m quite cross with you for not trying that *vol au*

vent, and I don't believe you even knew there were truffles in the *pâté*; you took none, I saw that. But you'll take some ice-pudding? You know what cold pudding's a cure for? ha, ha! and if you go on as you're doing you'll soon require it. I've watched you; I've seen you. Ah! you military men! you military men! you're all the same—can't keep your eyes off a pretty girl. Not that I blame you for it here, I'm sure; for, I must say it that shouldn't say it, there are few prettier girls than my two nieces."

"May I ask which two ladies have the honour of enjoying that relationship?" I inquired, as innocently as possible.

"Oh, how sly we are! as if you didn't know, when they've come between you and your dinner, and your duty to me too, sir; not that I mind that, for, between ourselves, I like to eat my dinner without chattering; and I know I'm old and fat, and military men don't like what's old and fat—you needn't interrupt me with your nonsense; and my nieces (since you pretend not to know) are, that one in pink, with the yellow hair and the daisies—that's my niece Mary; and the other in white, with the oak-leaves, that's Rose—Lady Rose—my darling and her uncle's darling; and she ought to be the darling of the whole world, for she's the best and sweetest and—but, bless me! how I run on! You see it's her simplicity and unstuck-upness that takes us all. We're not fine people—not the company she's used to at home—but she comes among us and never seems to notice any difference in our ways, or to be put out by things that put out Mary there, for instance—not but she's

a dear nice good girl too, with a kind heart of her own—but Rose is my pet. Her mother, Badger's" (Badger's !) "sister Susan, you see, had a good fortune of her own; and her father, the Earl of Belturbet, was a poor Irish lord, with a large family by a former countess—which accounts for our having to do with the aristocracy. But Susan has a family too, and the Earl's an expensive man, and gets through the money I fear, if he hasn't got through it already; and, altogether, poor Rose isn't an heiress like her cousin Mary, who is an only child. Her mother, another sister of Badger's, had a fortune too, and her father was a poor dragoon captain—which accounts for our connection with the army. He's a General now, and a 'Sir'—Sir Roland Richmond—a stuck-up padded old toad, with a head like a cockatoo—that is, when he's in full dress on the Queen's birthday at a review in Hyde Park, which is the only time I ever saw him, for he's too great for us, and not like poor Belturbet, who has no pride about him, and will borrow a hundred pounds from Badger just as if he wasn't a lord and descended from the emperors of Kerry. And it's seldom the General allows Mary to come here, and it's only because Rose comes that she's allowed, I know that; but I snap my fingers at the old fool, and he knows it, and—but, oh dear me! what a one you must think me, running on about what's nothing to nobody but ourselves, and there's Badger looking towards you."

The good lady had certainly contrived to make her statement pretty exhaustive of her subject. Her style of delivery suggested the idea that she had been

wound up (and so perhaps she had—by the champagne) to the speaking-point like a machine, and was bound to fire off a string of jerky sentences, and then come to an abrupt end with a metallic click. I cannot say, however, that I found her statement uninteresting. But at this point her husband interposed, bawling down the table to me, “I’ve been trying to catch your eye for the last half-hour, Captain; an awful talker is Mrs B. Once let her button-hole you and you’re done. Be thankful to me for saving you from her long tongue for a minute. Have a glass of wine with me? Hock? champagne? sherry? what shall it be?”

“Champagne, please.”

“Ah! you like my champagne? show your taste—import it myself. Drinking wine with each other’s out of fashion, they tell me; I don’t care, I like it; the wine don’t taste worse for a nod and smile; but I suppose you gay dragoons are too fashionable to hang on to old ways?”

Blinking the question of “dragoon,” which might be only Badger’s way of expressing his ideal of a very haughty and *recherché* class of officer, I replied, “On the contrary, my dear sir, at our mess we do hang on to the custom very much; and when a stranger dines with us he sometimes finds it difficult to meet his engagements in this way and preserve his equilibrium.”

Good heavens! what had I said? As I finished my sentence I swept my glance in the direction of the Parroquet, and was thunderstruck to behold on her face a look of horror and surprise; her eyes were dilated, her face deadly pale, and she stared at me

with a fixity that was quite unnerving. What had I said? Had the nectar of the gods been too much for me? Were all these immortals round the table there tipsy, and had I, unconsciously advancing with the common standard, also become as the beasts that perish? and, being in my cups, had I sworn, or in some other way misconducted myself?

“Polly!” cried her uncle, who was undeniably a little flustered with the grape. “Polly is quite shocked, Captain, at the idea of you fashionable dragoons” (dragoons again!) “being so unfashionable. See how the girl’s staring! Oh Lord! this bangs Banagher altogether! ha! ha! ha!” All regards being turned on Polly, the colour flushed back to her cheeks, her eyes dropped, and with a semi-hysterical laugh she muttered something about “thinking she saw a wasp.” This subterfuge might pass with the rest, but it didn’t deceive me. I was undoubtedly the wasp she had been staring at—but why with this expression? Perhaps a servant had upset large quantities of custard and cream over my shoulders, or some other such *contretemps* of the table had made me a ridiculous or loathly sight. I reassured myself on this head; but, after all, nothing of the sort could have agitated a young lady as this young lady seemed to be agitated. Confound these mysteries! they were beginning to be too much of a good thing. After a short interval Badger again addressed me: “I suppose you Aldershot gentlemen are pretty much on the road between London and the camp?”

“Some are,” I said.

“Ah! a gay life,” continued Badger, “but a hard

one; work all day and pleasure all night; drill and parade, ball and opera—burning the candle at both ends; killing work, eh?"

"Well," I said, "I can't accuse myself of much dissipation; I was at the opera" (and I turned my eyes full on the Parroquet) "for the first time this season last Saturday night."

The effect was unpleasantly beyond what I had anticipated. The poor girl gave a sort of sob, half rose from her seat, and would have fallen but for one of the immortals who supported her. Her aunt charged down upon her, and she was hustled out of the room in a fainting condition, escorted by all the ladies. The worthy Badger looked distressed. "Poor thing, poor thing!" he said; "it's the infernal heat. She's not such a goose as to be annoyed at my little fun; no, no, it's the heat. Peters, take up a large glass of brandy to Miss Richmond, and hot water and nutmeg, d'ye hear? Nothing like strong brandy-punch for quieting the nerves; tell her to toss it off. Poor thing, poor thing! it's the thunder in the air that's upset her, no doubt of it. Captain, help yourself and pass the claret, and we'll drink her better health, poor thing!"

I did as I was bid; I drank to her better health with all my heart, for a solution of the mysteries dawned upon me suddenly. The girl must be a maniac, out for a lucid interval which had abruptly concluded.

"And how is my worthy old friend?" inquired Badger of me when tranquillity had been restored.

I replied that the old gentleman (alluding to our

vicar, in virtue of whose introduction I believed myself to be there) was hale and hearty, and doing his duty like a man.

"That he always did, and always will do, honest old Jack," rejoined Badger.

There is no great resemblance between "Jack" and "Ephraim"—the vicar's real name; but "Jack" was probably an old school sobriquet.

"Does he ever sing 'Spankadillo' now?" continued my host.

"I certainly never heard him," I replied; and indeed it was just as likely that the Pope, in full canonicals, should sing 'Spankadillo' (which I took to be a comic song) as that our revered pastor should indulge in such an eccentricity.

"Ah! you should have heard him sing it, and seen him do the dancing with his face blacked; it was a great sight; and when old Jack was a little tight, it was quite glorious—quite."

"It must have been," I heartily assented, as a vision of the vicar, with his rusty black coat and gaiters, and solemn lantern jaws, performing in a state of inebriety the alleged act of buffoonery, rose to my mind.

"He's getting old now," continued Badger, "but he's as game as a chicken; it would have done your heart good to see him lick the 'welsher' the Derby before last. He's told you about *that* of course?"

I shook my head with a look of inquiring puzzlement.

"Oh! come, I must tell you about that—but, I

say, it's getting late, we ought to join the ladies ; and here's coffee."

The conversation then dropped. "If the mysterious conduct of Polly is caused by lunacy," I thought, "this nonsense of Mr Badger - Lewis may be fairly ascribed to intoxication. Yes, the Badger is certainly tipsy." But I rose from the table in a haze.

"I think," cried the host, when we got out of the dining-room, "the ladies will be in the garden. My wife lives in it, this hot weather : let us join them."

"Come into the garden, Maud," he sang, dancing up and laying hands on one of the guests, with whom he whirled round several times, ending by nearly falling down a flight of steps which led from the hall into the garden.

This was the Rev. Ephraim Rasper's rather quiet and early friend !

The garden in its arrangements was as odd and rambling as the mind of its proprietor seemed to be ; if there were no flowers—and they were conspicuous by their absence—this want was compensated for, after a fashion, by an amount of garniture due rather to art than to nature. There were, indeed, plenty of trees and shrubs of a sort—cedars, cactuses, aloes, araucarias, and suchlike ; but these passed unnoticed in the presence of a Chinese joss-house in bamboo, a Grecian temple of heath and moss, and the model of a Gothic cathedral woven from the flexible branches of the willow. Then there was a fountain and a bowling-green, an archery-ground and a croquet-lawn, a rockery and an aquarium. Everywhere the surrounding scene was reflected in those globular mirrors

which delight the taste of our Continental neighbours. On the whole, it was like a paddock in which had been collected, for auctioneering purposes, the "plant" of several *al fresco* places of amusement.

"Yes," said my host, in answer to some complimentary expressions of mine—"yes, we *do* think it is rather a success. There's a dash of the—of the medieval about it, eh? Lord Byron would have been at home here, sir: eastern climes and starry skies—that sort of thing, eh? My wife says it's like a scene out of *Lalla Rookh*—perhaps it is. I'm sure it was the other night when the Aldermen were dining with us, and we had fireworks, 'Elysian bouquets,' 'Arctic messengers,' and 'Chains of the gods.' Making it look like *Lalla Rookh* costs a pretty pennyworth, I can tell you, and I'm a prudent man; but it don't do to let mule twist and grey shirtings imagine that everything else is as flat as ditch-water. Do you play bowls? we've light for half an hour, I think. Hi! hi! Simpson, Bree, Dobson. Hi! you fellows! bowls, bowls, bowls! Come along, Captain."

"I don't play, thanks. I would rather walk about and look at the wonders of your fairy-land."

"Well, well, Liberty Hall; as you please. Here are some of the ladies—Jemima and Rose, well met. We're going to have half an hour's bowls, and the Captain here wants to look about him and admire all your nonsense."

"My nonsense, forsooth!"

"Yes, ma'am, so you and Rose must take him and show him your greatest triumph, the waterfall. Is it playing to-night?"

"Of course it is. I ordered it to be turned on at six o'clock."

"It's like your band, Captain, you see : it plays on guest-nights."

"I must go in myself," said Mrs Badger-Lewis, "to look after poor Mary ; but Rose, darling, you'll take the Captain to the fall, won't you ?"

"Oh ! I shall be very happy, But where are the other ladies ?"

"I suspect they will be anxious to stay beside the bowlers, but they ought to see the fall too ; send them on to it, Badger."

"All right."

The worthy couple then left us, and Lady Rose and I were alone together.

CHAPTER IV.

"Double, double, toil and trouble."—*Macbeth*.

Lady Rose and I were alone together ! I don't think I had ever been *tête-à-tête* with a lady before (except, perhaps, with my aunt on boxing-day) without wishing myself somewhere else. At present, however, I had no such feelings. I felt drawn towards my fair companion by a mysterious attraction which I could not define ; and, moreover, I had a strong practical purpose in view, that of unriddling the mystery of her cousin's mania, and of discovering, if possible, in what way I was connected with it.

On the whole, therefore, I had no inclination to run away, but felt so easy and fluent that I thought to myself, with some triumph, "If I select the weather as an initial topic, I do so out of respect to conventionalities, and not from necessity, by any means;" and thus advertising myself, I began the conversation as we strolled in the direction of the waterfall.

"What a heavenly evening! and how pleasant this coolness is, after the dreadful heat we have had all day!"

"It is a pleasant evening," she remarked briefly.

"You can't fancy," I continued, "how delightful it is to escape from the dusty camp into a scene like this!"

"Ah! it is very dusty in the camp, I suppose."

"Oh! dreadfully dusty. I suppose you've never been to the Sahara?"

"No, never."

"Well, I have" (a fiction, but she seemed so cool, it was necessary to rouse her a little).

"Really!"

"I have, and Aldershot strongly reminds me of it."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, particularly in a dust-storm."

"Oh!"

"Yes, particularly."

"Ah!"

Somehow the Sahara didn't seem to take.

"But here," continued I, gracefully waving my hand, and changing the subject, "here we are in an oasis."

"Did you ever see one?" she inquired.

"Oh! hundreds and thousands of them." How one falsehood does lead to another!

"I should have thought this was not the least like one," she continued.

"Well, it isn't, you know," I agreed.

"I thought you just said it was."

"Well, it is to a certain extent." Hang it! I was beginning to wander, and she was looking so cool and surprised. "To a certain extent," I explained; "that is, there is a moral resemblance, but no physical or technical likeness."

I very painfully knew I was talking nonsense, and, worse still, I knew that she knew it. She gave me a rapid glance (perhaps she too was speculating as to the effect of the Badgerian goblets), and then quietly remarked,—

"Oh dear! don't you think we are getting a little deep?"

There was something about the girl's manner I didn't make out; something snubbing about it. I felt snubbed, and that my self-possession was oozing away. I rallied myself, however, and tried to laugh off her last remark.

"Ha! ha! No, I don't think it is very deep. If we look at it philosophically, an oasis is—as I was saying, an oasis is analogically——"

"Really, really, the weather is too hot for metaphysics; suppose we try something else?"

Ah! there was no mistake about that—the snub direct. But with some grace, as I flatter myself, I pounced upon another subject which suggested itself, and went on. "Yes, certainly, and I ought to be

ashamed of myself for not having thought of something else sooner; and that is, to ask if your cousin is better."

"She is a little better," very icily.

"Ah! I am delighted to hear it; a thundery headache is a distressing thing."

"It must be, but I'm not aware that she has one. I haven't. Have you?"

"Oh no! certainly not—not the least."

"Dear me! I thought you said some one had."

"N-n-no."

What an odd girl! Her manner made me feel exceedingly foolish, and, feeling foolish, I know not why I should adhere to my theme of a thundery headache, but I did, advancing, with no relation to the truth, the statement that our quartermaster (Blackstock, who was as healthy as an elephant in the prime of life) was a sad martyr to affections of the sort. "Really!" she replied, evidently appreciating the statement at its true value. "Poor man! I'm so sorry!"

Her voice was as musical as I expected it to be—I may say as I knew it would be—and her accent had that slight suspicion of the Irish which is sometimes noticeable in the accents of even high-bred Irish ladies, and which conveys such a charming expression of freshness and *naïveté*. Sweet as her voice was, however, I could by no means say the same of her manner or tone towards me; indeed it was pretty evident that, for some reason or another, she had the greatest difficulty in being commonly civil. But why? and then I remembered her pe-

culiar expression at dinner. Was I for ever to be surrounded with these mists and mysteries? What had I done? Perhaps she had found out about my operatic passages; but what then? Supposing a lady bows to a man, is he to refuse to return it? Supposing she writes him a note, is he to fling it in her face? Supposing she does both, is he at once to know that she is a maniac? And why on earth did they bring her to the opera if she was insane? After all, was I her cousin's keeper? Nonsense; I wasn't going to stand it—I would probe this mystery; and so I returned to the charge.

"It is a pity your cousin is unable to be out this evening; it would have done her a world of good, I am sure."

Lady Rose turned upon me with a sudden animation. "Knowing, as you must do, sir, the cause of her indisposition, I think you might have withheld that remark."

Now thoroughly possessed with the idea of her cousin's insanity, I blundered on: "I really beg a thousand pardons, but as far as any *knowledge* of her malady goes, I assure you I have none. A surmise I certainly had formed, which I grieve to find is not without foundation, but I trust it is not a hopeless case; there are so many successful systems of treatment now, provided the affliction has not been allowed to become chronic. May I ask if it is of long standing?"

"You may certainly ask, sir, but it can scarcely be with a view to obtaining information; the question would be more properly addressed to yourself."

By heavens! was this girl mad too? Perhaps I had got into a private asylum by mistake. The host was a fair average lunatic, certainly, and the other guests and the whole entertainment were quite out of my experience. For reply I only stared at her.

"I must say, sir," continued the lady, "that you astonish me."

"I must say, Lady Rose, that I myself *never* felt more astonished in my life."

"This feigned innocence, this insulting unconsciousness," flashed out the lady, with increasing vehemence, "is more than I can endure. I did not expect to have to thank *you* for anything, certainly, but I *do* feel sincerely obliged to you for making me so angry that I *must* throw off all considerations of civility to my uncle's guest, and tell you how I loathe and detest your base unmanly character. Yes, and your vile conduct in winning the affections of a dear, pure-minded, loving girl, only for the gratification of your selfish vanity, and then treating her as your mood directs—*your* mood, forsooth!—smiles one day and coldness the next. My cousin, it is true, withholds her confidence; says little—almost nothing; but I can see with my eyes, and I can form conclusions for myself. This has gone on too long, sir! You shall not kill my cousin. Her health is breaking, her spirits are broken; but you shall be called to account—to account, sir! I have but to denounce you—and denounce you I will—to secure a reckoning for these accumulated insults."

"Lady Rose," I said, "there is some extraordinary mistake which I cannot explain, but——"

"There is no mistake—there can be no mistake. You came here deliberately on her uncle's invitation, did you not?"

"I believe I did," I replied.

"Ah! you are cautious, and slow to make admissions, I see; nevertheless you came here deliberately, knowing you would meet my cousin."

"I deny that," I said.

"You will deny, perhaps, that you received a note from her in the opera-house last week?"

"No, I won't; but, for heaven's sake, listen to me!"

"It is quite unnecessary. As I have said, Mary is reticent. I know, however, that you received a note from her, and I do not think I can be wrong in judging that it stipulated that if you came here tonight she was to accept it as a token that you meant to put your relations with her on a proper footing immediately. It would be ridiculous to suppose anything else. And now, from her sudden indisposition, I can only surmise that you have contrived (for oh! you gay 'mangeurs de coeurs,' as you call yourselves, have your deep well-practised arts of persecution) to communicate to her somehow that you have been graciously pleased to change your mind. The consequence is, she is violently ill. But this must stop, sir; it *must* and *shall* stop, Captain BURRIDGE!"

"Burridge, did you say? Can I believe my ears? Burridge? What! the old old story come to life again! Ha! ha! ha! Ha! ha! ha!" and I laughed long and loud. Vulgar perhaps, but quite hysterical, yet not the less displeasing to Lady Rose, who, remarking, "As you have thrown off even the outward

semblance of a gentleman, I shall leave you, but do not suppose that all this shall pass with impunity," began to walk rapidly away.

I came to myself at once. "Lady Rose," I cried, "stop—for pity's sake, for your own sake, for your cousin's sake especially—stop and listen. I told you there was a mistake somewhere; I see it now. I am not Captain Burridge."

"What!" she exclaimed, "not Captain Burridge? Why, I saw you once myself at Mrs Stainton's ball, and I recognise you perfectly."

"Nevertheless I am not the man; there is an extraordinary likeness between him and me which has produced many a *contretemps*, but never a painful one such as this before."

"How—how can I believe this?" faltered Lady Rose, looking aghast and faint.

"Madam, you must believe it; the situation is as painful to me as it is to you, but you may consider, I assure you, all that has passed as if it had not taken place."

"This is all very well," said Lady Rose, recovering herself, "but, pray, how do you come to personate Captain Burridge as my uncle's guest?"

"I don't personate him. I dine with your uncle in my own character as Captain Bruce of the — Fusiliers; there, this is your aunt's invitation," and I handed her the note.

"Mrs Lewis presents her compliments——' Why, what is this?' said Lady Rose. "Mrs Lewis! she is not my aunt."

"Not your aunt?—why, who is your aunt?"

"Mrs Badger, of course."

"Badger-Lewis, though, or Lewis-Badger?"

"Neither the one nor the other; and I know she thinks you are Captain Burridge, for a Manchester friend asked them to be civil to Captain Burridge when he came down here; and we heard a fortnight ago that his regiment was on the way, and so he was asked for this party; and, indeed, I thought my uncle had some sort of acquaintance with him."

"Well, I was asked to dine with a friend of our parish clergyman, a Mr Lewis, at Carysfort Villa here. I knew nothing of him, but accepted, and as I was looking for the house your uncle saw me, apparently recognised me, called me in, and in I came, not doubting that he was Mr Lewis, and hence this horrible imbroglio. Now I understand all the rest." Then I told her about the opera and the state of mystification I had been in, and added: "I see now the cause of your cousin's sudden agitation at dinner. It was when I spoke for the first time (now I think of it) that her expression changed and became one of real dismay. She must then have discovered her mistake, and it was very shortly after that she fainted; and I candidly confess to you, Lady Rose, that, under all the circumstances, I believed her to be insane. I beg you to assure her how deeply grieved I am to have been unwittingly the cause of distress to her. Pray say that I saw it was a case of mistaken identity from the first. Tell her that there is nothing uncommon in it, and that similar things have often before happened to me. As for the painful part of her secret which you have indicated, she need not know that I

have become possessed of it. If I have the happiness of again meeting you, which I hope I may, I may perhaps have an opportunity of telling you of many laughable cases that have arisen from the mistaken identity of Captain Bruce and Captain Burridge ; but, meantime, I must not forget that I am in an awkward position here, and should at once take my departure, after explaining to your uncle that I am here as an impostor, though an involuntary one."

"It is very kind of you, Captain Bruce, to take such a view of the matter," said Lady Rose, "and to show such an interest in saving dear Mary's feelings ; but I feel I do owe you a thousand apologies for my violence and rudeness ; and then the way I abused you ! Oh ! I shall never be able to bear the thought of it. What can I do ? What can I say ?"

"Pray, Lady Rose, do *not* think of it ; and as for your violence, as you call it, you know it was not directed against me really, but against one who apparently deserves stronger treatment. For the rest, as I am certain your uncle is too good-natured to feel anything but simple amusement at this comedy of errors, I can assure you that if it had not been for the pain I have seen you and your cousin suffer, I should look upon the whole episode as simply absurd and farcical."

"I am sure you are very kind and forgiving," said Lady Rose. "Perhaps, then, we had better go back to the house."

Nothing could be kinder or gentler than her manner had now become. In her generous wish to make the *amende* for the rating she had given me, she was

evidently trying to let me feel that I was the person to be commiserated under the circumstances. She seemed to feel that the rights of hospitality had somehow been violated in my person; and thus, from being a villain of the deepest dye, I now occupied the position of a rather high-minded martyr.

The shades of night had fallen upon our singular interview, and as we passed back through the garden (never, by the by, having reached the celebrated cascade), we found that it was deserted by the revellers. Rejoining the company after such a prolonged *tête-à-tête* would have been rather awkward under ordinary circumstances, but I knew the announcement I had to make to uncle Badger was a *coup de théâtre* which would cast everything into the shade.

We ascended to the drawing-room and entered. A lady had just finished singing a song at the piano, and our host and some of the guests were bustling about, arranging several tables for whist. Our entrance evoked a general exclamation.

“Well, my Lady Rose! well, my gallant Captain!” cried old Badger, “I thought you had lost yourselves in my extensive domain. Did you tumble over Niagara, or what? Give an account of yourselves—ha! ha! ha!”

“Dear Rose,” chorussed the aunt, “how very imprudent of you to stay out all this time in the dew. Where ever have you been?”

“It is entirely my fault, Mrs Badger,” said I—“entirely; and I have another confession to make, which I hope will not offend you. I am sure it will take you all very much by surprise.”

Mr and Mrs Badger looked puzzled. The spinsters pricked up their ears, half anticipating some new version of "the story without an end;" and the immortals fumbled their watch-chains and looked yearningly at the cards.

"Mr Badger," I said, "do you know who I am?"

"Know who you are, my dear sir! What an idea! What d'ye mean?"

"I mean what I say. Do you know my name?"

"Why, of course I do; you're Captain—tut, tut! —of course I do—Captain Blundell—no, hang me! —Blewit—Badger. Yes, you're Captain Bodger from Aldershot."

"No, I'm not."

"Well, well, I have a treacherous memory for names. What does it signify? You needn't be laughing, Jemima. Anyhow, you're old Timbrel's friend, and you're a Dragoon Guard, and a right good fellow into the bargain," he added, giving me a hearty apologetic slap on the shoulder.

"My dear sir," I replied, "I never heard of old Timbrel in my life before, and I'm not a Dragoon Guard; I'm a Fusilier."

Badger looked fairly bamboozled.

"Eh? what? Nonsense! Damme! it *was* old Timbrel, and I saw you at his house with my own blessed eyes. I did. Eh, Jemima?"

"Certainly," said Mrs Badger, "it was Mr Timbrel who asked us to pay any little civility we could to Captain Burridge."

"Exactly; but I'm not Captain Burridge—I'm a Scotch impostor."

There was a momentary silence, and then a shout of laughter, in which I myself joined.

"Well, well, well," continued Badger, "what does it all mean? If he's a Scotch impostor, Jemima, you had better count the spoons," and again Badger was overcome with mirth.

Seeing that the humour of the thing tickled the company, I continued plying our host in a serio-comic way, and at last told him how the matter really stood. Whereupon the mirth was redoubled, and when it subsided, old Badger heartily gave me his hand, and clapped me on the back, saying,—

"Well, it's been my very good luck, I'm sure, to make your acquaintance, and I hope you'll consider it all the same as a regular introduction, and come and see us often again, if our bad dinner hasn't frightened you; but, Lord bless us! when I think of it, it nearly kills me. There was I talking away about old Timbrel's tomfooleries, and you never saying a word, looking as grave as a judge—oh Lord! oh Lord!" and the old gentleman was off again. "And it was Lewis you were to have dined with? Well, I've swindled him out of your good company; but it oughtn't to be lost what a neighbour gets. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll call on Lewis to-morrow morning; I've never called on him yet—not from not wishing to be neighbourly, but somehow one puts these things off—and now this will be a rare excuse. I'll call on him to-morrow morning and make your apologies and tell him the fun; and, I'll tell you how we'll have some more fun: I'll ask Lewis to come and dine, and you must come, and we'll get this other

Captain to come the same day, and we'll compare notes. What a lark ! and you're really so like ? but I see it myself, bless me ! ha, ha, ha ! capital ! We'll have to ticket you, by Jove ! like port and sherry. You'll cut in for a rubber, won't you ? you're not afraid of being arrested as an impostor, eh ?"

"Oh no !" I replied ; "I would have no fears in such a hospitable house, even if I were one ; but it is late, and I must be getting back to the camp. My trap has been here for some time ;" for a servant had twice announced its arrival, and, on the second occasion, appeared to be struggling with a strong inclination to laugh, which I had no doubt was inspired by some vagaries on the part of Jack Leslie, whom it would be prudent to get off the premises as soon as possible.

"God bless me ! what's that ?" exclaimed Badger, as the tones of a key-bugle, sounding "the alarm," "the assembly," "the advance," and "the double," burst through the window in rapid succession.

"What can it be ?" said every one.

I knew very well what it was. Jack was intensely practising the instrument in question at that time, and was used, when he went off for an afternoon's "out," as he called it, to take the bugle with him for undisturbed practice in solitary places. Now the graceless wretch, being impatient, was undoubtedly using it as a fulcrum for my removal from the festive scene.

"I know what it is," I said ; but after so many extraordinary things I daren't tell the naked truth. "It's my fellow ; the scoundrel has got tipsy at the

inn, no doubt, and he's musically inclined, and constantly carries that key-bugle about with him, and he is making the noise, I am afraid; so I will get him away as quickly as I can. Good-night, Mrs Badger; good-night, Lady Rose; I hope I shall—I hope I shall have the—the—good-night;” and I dashed on to the staircase, followed by my host.

“Drunk, did you say?” he inquired.

“I’m afraid so,” I replied.

“God bless me! I hope he hasn’t been over my borders with his wheels.”

“Oh no! he’s pretty steady, even when he’s much in liquor.”

“Well, that is a thing I never could stand—a drunken groom. Take my advice and send him to the lock-up at once.”

By this time we had reached the hall-door, and were saluted with a cry from the outer darkness,—

“Now then, stoopid, air you coming?”

This was too much for Mr Badger, and he bawled out,—

“Yes, we’re coming, you scoundrel; and I’ve just been advising your master to send you to the lock-up.”

“Lock up your jaw, old Calipash,” responded Jack.

“Silence, John!” I thundered.

“Oh! you really ought to have him locked up,” implored Mr Badger. “James and William can run him down in a twinkling; say the word and it’s done.”

“Clear your throat, you old bloater!” cried Jack; and indeed the old gentleman was husky with excitement.

"Oh, this is monstrous!" cried Badger. "At all events, let me beseech you not to let him drive."

"Oh! that I won't," I said, springing on to the step.

"No man drives my mare but myself," said Jack, showing fight, and clutching the reins.

"We'll see about that," I said; and wresting the reins from him after a short tussle, I drove off at a canter.

"MIND THE ARAUCARIA!" This was the Badger's last good-night.

Jack was, as I expected, decidedly tipsy, and not a little savage at my usurpation of the ribbons.

"You're a nice fellow," he said, "to oblige—running off with a fellow's mare and trap like that."

"And you're a nice sort of fellow," I rejoined, "to come disgracing me, and yourself, and the regiment, at a stranger's house, with your blackguardly conduct."

"I'll shoot that old soap-boiling friend of yours," blustered Jack; "lock-up, forsooth!"

"It would have served you right if I had let his fellows trot you down there for the night."

"Yes; and I like your swaggering me—me, a commissioned ens—officer, I mean—as your private servant. Confounded cheek!"

"You'd better shut up, Mr Jack. I should certainly have been ashamed to pass you off as an officer in a regiment I belonged to."

Jack hereupon relapsed into heavy sulks, and after a silent drive home, parted from me at my quarters without saying "Good-night."

CHAPTER V.

“ Not caring to observe the wind,
Or the new sea explore,
Snatched from myself, how far behind
Already I behold the shore.”

—WALLER.

The evening, the events of which were detailed in the last chapter, had been a very exciting one; and as my ordinary life was quiet and uneventful, I was all the more affected by the strange incidents which it had presented. I was not sorry, therefore, that Jack took the unchristian line of parting with me in the sulks, for otherwise he would inevitably have favoured me with his society in my quarters, and I was anxious to be alone. Alone, however, I was not to be, for on opening the door of my hut I saw with much irritation that the room had already an occupant.

Seated in front of the fire, with his abominable coarse ammunition-boots disposed one on either side of the chimney-piece, was my professional ally Blackstock.

A glass of whisky-punch dispensed its steamy aroma about the room, and the atmosphere was additionally clouded with the fumes of some very rank tobacco. The spectacle was not unusual; almost any night of the seven my room might have been seen under similar conditions; for I had taken Blackstock up and patronised him, in consideration of his pro-

fessional attainments and the enthusiasm with which he shared my devotion to the minutiae of the service, in which respect I was otherwise without congenial society in the regiment. The spectacle was therefore by no means unusual, and would have been, on any previous night, welcome ; but to-night everything seemed different.

On the instant I conceived a fierce loathing for Blackstock, tipple, tobacco, tactics, and all, and I could scarcely repress an exclamation of wrath and disgust when I saw him lolling familiarly in my arm-chair. Somehow scales seemed to fall from my eyes in the matter of Blackstock. He was getting too big for his boots ; and then his abominable tobacco and whisky—faugh ! it was insufferable. Poor Blackstock, unconscious of the sudden revulsion of feeling against him, threw his head familiarly back without moving from his seat, and observed,—

“ ’Ulloa ! ’ere you are at last.”

I have already mentioned that he had been raised from the ranks, and I may add that he had not brought many “ h’s ” up with him from that sphere of usefulness.

“ Yes,” I said, grimly, taking off my overcoat, “ here I am.”

“ A precious wait I’ve ’ad of it for you,” he continued.

“ What ? ” said I, more grimly.

He repeated the observation.

“ I never asked you to wait, did I ? ” said I.

“ No, but you’d ’ave been wild ’ad I gone to bed without showing you wot I’ve got here.”

"I think I would have survived it," I said, chafing horribly.

"You don't seem keen about it," continued Blackstock.

"Very likely; I'm certain I don't feel keen—I'm sleepy;" and I began to light a candle.

The unconscious enthusiast began to unfold a sort of chart he had been making, and went on,—

"Your idea about skirmishers in Cocked 'At Wood won't wash at all."

"Won't it?" I growled between my teeth.

"No, it won't; I've done it out here geometrically. You see cavalry approaching Cocked 'At Wood from the left front would have an immense advantage; we mustn't forget that. Cocked 'At Wood is not a thing to be blinked, mind you. Once let your enemy lodge his skirmishers in Cocked 'At Wood——"

"Oh! confound Cocked Hat Wood!" I roared, incapable of further self-restraint.

I believe Blackstock turned pale. In his view it was much as if Job had followed the reckless advice of his wife. He looked up at me with horror in his eyes, and said solemnly,—

"'Ulloa, Bruce; I say, *'ave* you been drinking?"

"Yes, of course I have; men generally do when they eat dinner, don't they?"

"Yes; but are you sure you're '*regular*’?"

"No, I'm sure of nothing but one thing, and that is that I'm going to bed."

"Old 'ard, old feller, 'ere's something that will fetch you, I know. I put it in my pocket expressly to show you when I came over. It's very neat—there!—a new

idea for the tongue of the havresack-buckle. What think you of that?" and he stood back like an artist when he lovingly surveys an art-gem of his own creation—and then, approaching the table, sat down to expatiate on its merits.

He looked so coarse and dirty, my temper fairly gave way, and I thundered out—

"Take away your huckstering inventions out of my hut; I won't have them here. I tell you I'm sick of your everlasting pipe-clay!" and so saying, I dashed into my interior den and went to bed.

Poor Blackstock! how many a pang of remorse I have felt since for my brutal conduct. He looked stupefied. I heard him sorrowfully buckling on the sword, without which he never left his quarters, and, as he retired from the hut, sadly murmuring to himself, "Wot a norrible example! Drunk and using disrespectful language of the army and its accoutrements! The senior captain, too. 'Orrid!'"

I had wished to be alone that I might think. Well, now that I was alone, I found this no easy matter. I wished to review the whole events of that evening from the beginning—to live over again the drama in which I had certainly played no small part, and which, although it had been strange enough, yet seemed to have left my mind in a state of excitement rather difficult to account for even by its events.

I would begin my review methodically, I thought. I would begin with the dinner; and I figured to myself Mary Richmond sitting radiant with her sunny hair, and launching upon me those glances which were meant for the infamous Burridge. Then

rose the figure of her cousin—those divine eyes, that graceful little head, the harmonious undulations of her figure, her bright silvery laugh, her strange glance at me. Then Badger, bold, blatant, florid, and hearty—the exquisite contour of the neck, those tresses that might have tempted the wooing of every Zephyr that—hulloa ! wandering ; it was Badger I was at ; yes, Badger, bold and blatant, with his immense white waistcoat, his cheery laugh, and those lips—ah ! those lips, formed but to utter a music—tut, tut ! this was nonsense. I couldn't think. I was feverish. I would compose myself ; I would count eight hundred and go to sleep. I got up to the nineties. Ninety-five—ninety-six—ninety-seven—ninety-eight—ninety-nine—one hundred. One hundred years ! in one hundred years it will be all the same. But will the waterfall be still working then ? Will the joss-house be—a hundred-and-one—two, three, four, &c. &c. &c.—eighteen. Ah ! sweet eighteen ! ah ! that is the age, accompanied with those divine eyes, that aureole-like hair, and—nineteen, twenty—one, two, three—if I were with thee, how happy I'd be !—tweedledum, tweedledee ! Pshaw ! this was drivelling. I had lost command of my thoughts. I got out of bed, plunged my head in water, drank copiously of the same element, rolled back into bed again, and at last slept ; but what slumbers ! what dreams ! Never for an instant could I get rid of the infernal joss-house. It was a temple of fame, on the top of which Mr Badger pirouetted on his head. Lady Rose and Miss Richmond leaned from a window on either side of it, sounding sweetly

upon key-bugles "the alarm" and "the assembly;" while around it, hand-in-hand, the entire Stock Exchange of London uproariously hoofed in the May-pole dance. Suddenly it became a "lock-up" in which the vicar, loudly singing 'Spankadillo,' was incarcerated for debt, while on a light and lustrous cloud Lady Rose floated above, kindly applauding the imprisoned minstrel. Then I was sitting in it, now very much shrunk in its dimensions, and fitted as a second-class railway carriage. It was placed on a truck, which was dashing across the desert at a hundred miles an hour. As the truck violently oscillated, the joss-house was in perpetual danger of falling over. The seat on which I sat was too small for two, but Badger insisted on sharing it with me; and as one succeeded occasionally in shoving the other close to the edge, horrible cries of terror were raised by the sufferer. Then, suddenly, a sweet voice—oh! so soft and sweet—came in through the roof and said, "This must stop; this *must* and *shall* stop," and my troubled dreams were over.

One does not awake very fresh from slumbers of this sort, and when I awoke and heard the bugles sounding the warning for parade, parade appeared to me impossible—everything appeared impossible; so I wrote a hasty note to the colonel for leave, and again threw myself down; and there I lay all that day—at least all that forenoon—sometimes asleep, sometimes awake, but in either condition it was evident I was passing through some mental phase of which hitherto I had had no experience. Because I had been taken for another man under rather peculiar circumstances,

was that a reason why I should become a sort of lunatic ? True, it was painful to have unwittingly become possessed of a lady's secret. I was very, very sorry for Lady Rose, and, with her high spirit and refined mind, that she should be placed in such a position was most distressing ; but, after all, though I seemed always to bestow my commiseration on her, it was Miss Richmond who was the real sufferer by "that base unmanly Burridge ;" and there, too, another thing—why on earth was I so bitter against this man ? I had only had a faint glimpse of the situation—a one-sided view of the matter. Burridge might be innocent after all ; Burridge might explain. Perhaps Miss Richmond was a vixen—hysterical people often are. Burridge might probably do the right thing in the end ; and even if he didn't, he wasn't trifling with *my* affections. What reason had *I* for this furious animus against the man ?

It was useless reasoning. On recurring to the idea of Burridge, he always took the shape of a base unmanly scoundrel, an infamous rascal, a detestable palterer, and so forth ; and my heart swelled with the feeling that I could throttle him, when I thought upon the cruel injuries he had inflicted on Lady Rose ; but then it was Miss Richmond he had injured—if, indeed, he had injured any one. Round and round in a circle thus went my feverish thoughts, and my mind felt bruised and hammered like the ground on which the unceasing mill-horse batters his heavy hoofs.

The regimental dogs, who were all my fast friends, came one by one to look after me, and went away

saddened and surprised, in that boots and shoes were hurled at them. Jack Leslie came to apologise and make it up, and was grimly told that "it didn't signify." Blackstock, meekly arriving under pretence of looking for the model tongue of the havresack-buckle, attempted to recover favour by reintroducing that subject. It surpassed his belief that sobriety should condemn what supposed inebriety had insulted—but so he found it. At last I sat up and soliloquised. "I see what it is, Donald Bruce, you're hipped—that's what you are; you've been bored by that stupid old 'Ran-ker,' with his chin-straps, and his knapsacks, and his 'true position' of the everlasting soldier. Yes, you've been badly bored, dangerously bored, and the consequence is, that when you get a little excitement—like last night's adventure, for instance—it's too much for you. But this must stop; ha! this must and shall stop. What you want is change and amusement. So you get up and dress, have some luncheon, one large glass of sherry, or even two if you like, order your pony and take a ride. You're bound, by the by, in common civility, to make an apologetic and thanksgiving call on Mrs Badger; so up with you." I did as my spirit bade me, and began to feel better from that moment.

Having fulfilled the earlier part of the programme laid down by my counselling spirit, I mounted my well-bred little chestnut, "Captain Crosstree," and rode away in the direction of F——. After the feverish night I had passed, the fresh air and the bright sun, coupled with the exercise, were peculiarly grateful, and before long I began to feel restored

to something like myself, "A queer fellow I must be!" thought I, as I rode along. "What could have been the matter with me? Perhaps there is a latent strain of insanity in our family, or perhaps Badger's turtle wasn't so fresh as——no, hang it!" and I was quite unreasonably angry with myself for this solution; and as it was apparent that if I began to think about it again I should have another relapse, I "concluded," as the Yankees say, not to think at all; and availing myself of a nice springy bit of turf on the roadside, I gave Captain Crosstree a breather till the outskirts of F—— were in sight. Here I was suddenly reminded of Mr Lewis, my host-that-should-have-been of the previous evening, and of the propriety of paying my devoirs at his residence in the first instance. Oddly enough, the very first of the series of villas proved to be his; there it was, "Carysfort Villa" emblazoned in large white letters on the gate-post; and Jack and I must have passed it unnoticed the night before, because it stood exceptionally apart from the principal cluster, and it was only on reaching them that we began to think of looking for it. It was indeed a great contrast in its aspect to the florid magnificence of Mr Badger's abode.

Mr Lewis was from home, but I was shown into a small and dingy drawing-room, where I was received by his wife, whose whole air, manner, and aspect suggested the idea of a loss of colour; she seemed to be washed out; her eyes, her hair, her cheeks, her cap-ribbons, and her dress, all were faded; and when she spoke, the flat and lugubrious tone of her voice

revealed a spirit to which light and sunshine were strangers. She communicated her ideas in short sentences delivered in one unvarying key, and in the warily *staccato* manner of a parson reading the Psalms, and afraid of being run into by the responses.

“My husband is from home, Captain Bruce; I regret that he has missed you.” She intoned this, and, musically reported, she spoke on this wise:—

“I am very sorry indeed,” I replied, “but will you kindly convey to him also the apology which I have to make to you for my non-appearance last night?”

“He knows, he understands the reason,” she said; “it was laughable” (and she looked as dismal as a mute), “it was laughable; but perhaps you were a gainer by the mistake.”

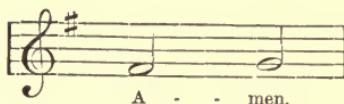
“On the contrary, my dear madam,” I began——

“You were a gainer by the mistake,” she insisted, “in a certain sense. Our poor house is not to be compared to Mr Badger’s in temporal things: we cannot entertain: we are not entitled to entertain: and we do not entertain.”

I tried to get up a complimentary speech to the effect that if there *was* a residence whose entertainments the public were likely to approach with more than ordinary avidity, &c. &c., but I broke down, and she went on,—

"And therefore I say that you were a gainer. We should not have ventured to ask you: but our good friend Mr Rasper: spoke of you in a way: that emboldened us to do so: he seemed to think that you might relish: the change of a quiet evening: and we invited you: but as far as creature comforts are concerned: you were a gainer in Mr Badger's home." I certainly began to agree with her, but I loudly disclaimed the idea. She continued, "Mr Badger has himself called to-day: it was well meant, but he is a boisterous man: and, I fear, a worldling. He explained your absence: and invited us to his home: to dinner next Thursday: at seven o'clock. We have respectfully declined: it was well meant: we are bound to think charitably of our brothers: it was well meant, I dare to say: but we declined it: we are not given to mirth and revelry:" (her looks did her the grossest injustice if she was) "and Mr Badger's home is spoken of: as a place: where cards: and wine: and dancing are permitted: therefore we respectfully declined."

Here she paused a moment, and I could hardly refrain from responding



"Had you been with us last night," she went on, "you would have met a precious man: a Scotchman like yourself: Toozle M'Foozle, the missionary from Tongaloo. He told us sweet facts: his trumpet-

tongue has been heard : there is an upheaving in the island. Whiki-Whacky, the king of the Bouples : has had his eyes opened. I regret that you missed him : it was a blessed refreshment."

"Ah ! it must have been, my dear madam," said I, hastily rising to take my leave, and blessing the accident that had spared me the trumpet utterances of the M'Foozle.

"Will you not rest a while ? the day is hot : will you drink some whey ? "

"Thank you very much, I have a most pressing engagement, and could only permit myself the pleasure of a flying call on this occasion ; another time I hope to be more fortunate ;" and I was off—"and if ever," thought I, "I enter this house again, may I be —whey indeed !"

Receiving Captain Crosstree from the hands of a sad-looking gardener, I rode away in the direction of Mr Badger's house. There was no difficulty in recognising it ; it towered above its neighbours, and in its *bizarre* construction impartially favoured every order of architecture. As I entered the gates (it was too great to have its name—the Hermitage—inscribed thereon), I looked out for the Araucaria, and was glad to see that it flourished intact ; the track of Jack's erratic course on entering was, however, painfully legible in a neatly-defined arc cut in the well-shaven turf of the semicircular lawn ; and it was awfully evident that a Syrinx in stucco had very nearly been permanently relieved from the pursuit of her stucco persecutor.

Mr Badger had gone to London, the servant said,

but the ladies were within ; would I have my horse put up ? Like master like man ; this was hospitable ; such was evidently the custom of Badger Hall. No, I wouldn't have my horse put up, but I would go in and see the ladies ; and in I went. I felt a little queer as I ascended the staircase ; perhaps I felt the awkwardness of meeting Miss Richmond after the crisis of last evening—I don't know ; at all events, I was spared that trial. When I entered the drawing-room Mrs Badger was there alone. The worthy lady received me most cordially.

"I seem," said I, "to have so many apologies to make, Mrs Badger, that I scarcely know where to begin."

"Apologies, Captain Bruce ! Nothing of the sort—quite the contrary ; if there is an apology to be made, it is my husband should make it for misleading you ; but I assure you *we* all consider it a very fortunate blunder, and I hope you do too " (ha ! I had made a favourable impression, then) ; " and you took it so nicely and easily, and made us all laugh so with your fun about the 'impostor,' and all that—my gracious ! how we *did* laugh ! Badger says he thinks he's broken a rib ; I say he's too fat for that ; but, anyhow, he's not laughed so much for an age, and that's saying a good deal ; and he's wild to get you to come back and dine again and meet your 'double ;' and you will, won't you, very soon ? "

"I shall be only too happy, I assure you. Pray, how is Miss Richmond to-day ? "

"Ah ! poor Mary, she's had a sad night of it ! that's the only unpleasant part of our party. She had an-

other fit of hysterics, and didn't sleep all night ; but she's sleeping now, and her uncle is to bring her something from town that I hope will do her good. It was the heat yesterday, I'm certain."

"No doubt," I said ; "it was very thundery last night ; I couldn't sleep myself ; and I hope Lady Rose is not the worse of being out so late in the dew ?"

"Oh ! Rose is perfectly well ; we were just going out to take the air in the grounds—and here she is to speak for herself."

I experienced a temporary relapse into some of the sensations of last night as she entered : the blood ebbed suddenly from my heart, flashed into my temples, tingled in my feet, and throbbed in my hands. I rose, and, rising and looking at her as she advanced, there suddenly flitted across my mind the lines of Tennyson—

"To whom

Coming through heaven like a light that grows
Larger and clearer, with one mind the gods
Rise up for reverence."

Then from amid these verses started out a fierce and crying conviction that my face was red, my voice thick and husky ; that my boots were a great deal too big for my feet, and my feet for the rest of my body ; that the sun had taken the skin off the bridge of my nose ; that I had cut myself shaving that morning ; that the uncicatrised wound was going to bleed copiously, and that, if it did, I had left my pocket-handkerchief at home ;—all this flashed through my mind like something revealed by lightning as I advanced to meet her.

Her greeting was kind, unconscious, and calm—as indeed, why should it be otherwise? and my mind speedily regained its composure, and I recognised, in detail, that, dressed in white with a white straw hat, garlanded with a wreath of wild-flowers and trimmed with violet ribbon, with which also her hair was confined, her beauty showed to still greater advantage than in the more elaborate toilet of the evening. I noted all this in a second or two.

“ You are not afraid, then,” she said, with a smile, “ to come back to the scene of your last night’s imposition? Perhaps you don’t know that my uncle is a magistrate—a very formidable person indeed?”

“ I suppose,” said I, “ I have the audacity of my craft.”

“ And I hope you have not been very severe with your poor groom. I never could forgive you if you were. That climax of our mystification was really too delightful; but you missed the best of it—my uncle’s righteous indignation. But at last he was mollified; we all laughed so, he was fairly compelled to join in the chorus, and he admitted that, if there was no damage done to the Araucaria, it was not such a bad joke after all.”

“ I am ashamed to recollect the fellow’s conduct,” I said; “ I have not decided what to do with him yet;” and I tried to look as grim as if my intentions oscillated between the bastinado and the knout.

“ Oh, aunt! intercede for him. Captain Bruce, you must forgive him—consider the amusement he afforded. Do, pray, let him off. Is he in the guard-room now?”

"N-n-n-no, not exactly ; he's under surveillance ; but, since you throw yourself into the scale with Mercy against Justice, why, of course, Justice has no chance ; the man must be forgiven," and I said this with an air of self-sacrifice.

"To err is human, to forgive divine," said Lady Rose ; "and since you have behaved so well, you shall be rewarded. You shall go out with us into my uncle's wonderland and see the waterfall, after last night's disappointment."

"What ?" broke in Mrs Badger, "did you not get to the fall after all ? What ever were you about ?"

Lady Rose and I exchanged glances, and somehow this little confidence was delightful to me.

"Oh !" I said, carelessly, "it was too dark last night to see all its mechanism."

"Well, I'm afraid you must put off seeing it till your next visit, for the gardeners are terribly busy to-day with some new mushroom-beds, and I don't know who to get to pump it on."

"Oh ! thanks ; it will be something to look forward to another time."

"But let us go out and look about us, and take the air ; it is a pity to lose such a lovely day. Come away, Rose."

We passed into the Badger fairy-land. There was the joss-house and the other grotesque things which had furnished my visions of the night. I felt half surprised to see them looking so tame and innocent. And there was the angle in the walk where Lady Rose had turned upon me with fierce denunciations. Was it possible that this was the same Lady Rose ? with that

quiet playful manner? those gentle eyes? that silvery voice? Was it possible that the Heré of last night, flashing scorn and splendid indignation, stood before me now, clothed, by some wondrous transfiguration, in the tender graces of Aphrodité? "Idalian Aphrodité—beautiful! Fresh as the foam new-bathed in Paphian wells." Oh exquisite loveliness! oh perfection of beauty, incomparable in either mood!

She saw that my eyes were fixed upon her, and, probably divining the tenor of my thoughts, said hurriedly and with a blush,—

"Oh, aunt! I must not forget—some flowers for Mary; let us go to the greenhouse. Are you fond of flowers, Captain Bruce?"

"I like everything that is beautiful, Lady Rose," I replied.

"Ah! that is a Scotch answer," she said; "you won't commit yourself."

"Now tell me," I retorted, "how an Irishman would have answered."

"Oh! that is another thing. I'm not bound to criminate myself."

"Ah, ha! there is one to mark for me," I cried.

"How?"

"Why, you're not an Irishman."

"Then we're equal," she laughed, "and may start fair again."

"Well, Lady Rose, I will throw off my national caution, and admit that I am intensely fond of flowers, but I'm so dreadfully ignorant of the science that belongs to them, even of their names, that I am shy of alluding to my passion."

"If the passion was a true one, would you not learn the names of your charmers?"

"Yes; but when one only gets a fleeting glimpse of the adored object from time to time, how is an intimacy to be arrived at?"

"Are there no flowers at the camp?"

"Lady Rose, have you ever seen it?"

"Oh! I forgot; you said it was exactly like the Sahara," she replied, very demurely.

"So it is, and there are not many flowers there, you know; but," and I changed the subject hurriedly—"but tell me the names of your special favourites."

"Oh! the time would fail me; for I am very catholic in my tastes, and have so many special favourites that they can hardly be called special. Now help me" (as we entered the greenhouse) "to select a bouquet for my cousin;" and we set to work, discussing and selecting, I cutting the flowers decided on.

Mrs Badger very soon got bored, and went away on the pretext of keeping Miss Richmond company, and we were alone. A week ago, could I have penetrated the future, and seen myself—a bird, timid, *farouche*, and shy, as far as the fair sex were concerned—could I have seen myself, I say, thus caught and tamed not unwilling, cheerily hopping from spray to spray, and twittering back unabashed the bright sallies and ringing mirth of a beautiful young lady, how would I have stared with astonishment! But, after all, what a lot of things there are that would make us stare if we could only see them; and what saith the Persian bard with a hard name, which I decline to spell, "The

bee, the serpent, and the bird, are they not quelled on a sudden by the glamour of their charmers? then why not mortal man, whose breath is in his nostrils?" Certainly, why not? also Amen.

"You have spoken to your cousin, Lady Rose?" I asked, suddenly.

"On several occasions," she replied, archly.

"Yes; but I mean—but I mean——"

"Oh yes, I have spoken to her about what you mean—that is, as much as I could venture at the time. You are quite exculpated; pray do not be uneasy."

"Oh! I wasn't thinking of that; but I mean—I mean—it is very sad—I am infinitely distressed—this Captain Burridge—I mean——"

"I know exactly what you mean; you want a flower for your button-hole, and you shall have it; here, this red geranium will be most appropriate," and she gave it me with a sort of wicked smile.

My little attempt to get up a confidence (why should I be so anxious for a confidence?) had broken down; but why couldn't I say something neat and telling in acknowledgment of the flower? I couldn't, at all events. I received it clumsily, said "I——" stopped, placed it in my button-hole, coughed, said "I——" again (confound it! where were my ideas?), and had the satisfaction of seeing her fall into a paroxysm of laughter.

"Oh! Captain Bruce," she sobbed, "forgive me—forgive me; the Scotch are a most respectable nation, but——" and she was off again.

Hang it! I didn't like this; I would sulk a little. I did so: she was full of penitence at once.

"Forgive me; I don't know why I should laugh so. It was something about—" but she couldn't finish her sentence, and after another recovery said—

"Come and have some tea, and scold me all the way—I deserve it." Who could resist this?

I hate being laughed at—who doesn't? If Tom Smith laughs at me, I punch his head, morally or physically, as may seem most expedient; but if "Idalian Aphrodité—beautiful" does so, and apologises, why—well, well.

When we got back to the house Mr Badger had arrived, and afternoon tea was discussed to the loud symphony of that boisterous worldling's laughter.

Badger rather jarred on me to-day, but I took good care he shouldn't know it. Indeed I felt that I was solicitous for Badger's good opinion. We compared notes as to our respective interviews with Mrs Lewis, over whom he nearly fractured another rib.

At last I begged to have Captain Crosstree ordered, and he was brought round.

"Oh, what a lovely pony!" cried Lady Rose, looking at him from the window. "What is his name?"

"'Captain Crosstree is his name,'" quoted I, from the popular song of that drama whose popularity lately became a little too tiresome and monotonous.

"I *must* go down and speak to him;" and she went, bearing biscuits for the fortunate animal.

Badger and I followed. Badger had taken a fancy to me (why not?), asked me to "name a day" or to "come any day and take pot-luck." "It's a pleasure,"

he explained, "after a hard day in the city, to have a talk and a laugh, and send one's worries to the devil;" and I readily consented to assist at the desired elimination. When we reached the hall-door, impulsive Lady Rose was fondling and caressing "the Captain," feeding him with biscuits, and kissing the white star on his forehead.

"I have quite fallen in love with Captain Crosstree," she cried.

I nearly had a fit of apoplexy in trying to recall an appropriate quotation from the prevailing drama, but again I failed. Dolt!

"And he shall have a nosegay too," she said, patting him on the neck, and plucking from the wall two sprigs of jessamine, with which she decorated the head-band of the glorified quadruped.

"When Captain Crosstree wakes to-morrow," I cried, "he will say with the Athenian weaver, after Titania's caressing touch had been laid upon him, 'I have had a dream—a dream—past the wit of man to say what a dream I have had;'" and having said this, I felt that I had not lived that day quite in vain, and rode off ecstatic.

I trotted rapidly through the outskirts of the village, never for an instant taking my eyes from the jessamine sprigs which bobbed in front of me; but when the last villa was invisible, and I was myself under the friendly shade of wayside trees, I pulled up, and dismounting, basely despoiled "the Captain" of his ornaments. I put them in my hat-band for safe keeping, apologised to the pony for the theft by patting him on the neck and fondling his nose, and



"A theft"



then casting a nervous glance up and down the road, I hastily imprinted a guilty kiss on his white star, and remounting, galloped off covered with shame and confusion of face. It was a heavenly afternoon ; rain had lightly fallen in the early morning, but the sky had been serenely blue ever since, and the sun was drawing forth new freshness on wood and meadow, as yet unjaded by the summer heat. The hay-harvest was nearly finished, and the air was enriched with its fragrance, rich with the blended perfumes of a myriad wild-flowers that “ran riot, garlanding” hedgerow and bank, draping all that was unsightly and commonplace—prosaic paling and decrepit wall—with the transfiguring mantle of their glorious bloom and their exuberant youth. Even the stolid Hants labourers dimly recognised the fitness of things by decorating hat and sun-bonnet with the flowers and blossoms which nature seemed to thrust upon them ; even they, touched by an unconscious inspiration, lifted up their voices and sang. Mellowed by distance, their strains came pleasantly from far-away meadows, blending in the woods around me with the full-toned chorus of the birds, and with the humming of a brook that went glimmering through the sylvan arcades and vistas. Glimpses of lucid cloud, gleams of liquid blue, rays and flashes of mingled green and gold, shot through the young foliage of the boughs that here and there quite over-canopied the road. Life, light, beauty, fragrance, music, joy ! Nature was in an ecstasy herself, and calling ecstatic on the heart of man to rejoice with her and to be glad. I accepted her summons : I sang—I shouted ; whereupon consentaneous Captain

Crosstree took the bit between his teeth and ran off with me, *nolens volens*, for a good two miles, and only stopped in deference to a long hill which restored to me the mastery. I then threw the reins upon the pony's neck, and as we sauntered up the long ascent, I grappled with myself—that is, two spirits, a questioning and an answering spirit, undertook to carry on within me an investigation, and when we had reached the summit a solution had been arrived at.

"Am not I," began the inquiring spirit who represented myself—"Am not I, Donald Bruce, now turning thirty years of age?"

"You are, indeed," was the reply.

"Have not my sisters stuck flowers in my pony's head any time these fifteen years?"

"They have."

"Did I ever take them out and stick them in my hat-band?"

"Never."

"Did I ever kiss Captain Crosstree's white star before?"

"Certainly not."

"I have often ridden on this road before, I think?"

"Dozens of times."

"On summer evenings when the sun was as bright, the sky as blue, and the trees as green, the perfume of the woods and the meadows as fragrant, the song of the birds and the haymakers as sweet?"

"Of course—of course."

"Was I ever affected by these things as I am now?"

"No, you never made such an ass of yourself in all your life before."

"I was sober last night, I think ? "

"As a judge."

"Yet my mind was in a frenzy ? "

"Absurdly so."

"I invariably sleep well ? "

"Heavily."

"But last night I lay awake till dawn ? "

"You lay awake till the bugle went for recruits' drill."

"Is it conceivable that, twenty-four hours ago, I should have recognised a musical combination of letters in the word 'Badger' ? "

"It is quite inconceivable."

"Yet to-day I do ? "

"To-day the word Badger is by no means un-euphonious to you."

"Was I ever conscious of having large boots and clumsy feet on a previous occasion ? "

"You were always confoundedly proud of them."

"I have no organic heart-complaint, I think ? "

"You are as sound as a prize-fighter."

"Yet my heart palpitated as I went up-stairs this afternoon ? "

"True it did, furiously."

"Why ? "

"Because you are ill of a strange disorder."

"What produced it ? "

"Look into the hedgerow there beside you."

"Why ? "

"Because you can read an answer there."

"What is there ? "

"A flower."

"Oh ! I see—a rose—a rose ; " and as I plucked it

a sweet and already well-nigh revealed apocalypse flashed full upon me. “I love her—I adore her—I worship her. I have seen her but twice; this, then, is love at first sight, disbelieved in by the many, contemned by the most. What matters it? I love her—I adore her. Had it been but one fleeting glimpse, I should have loved her for ever: and have I not spoken to her?—have I not listened to the ineffable music of her voice, and received into my inmost soul the heavenly scintillations of her angel-eyes? Am I transformed by some magic spell—seeing with new eyes and hearing with new ears? Was I alive till yesterday? Did the sun ever shine before? Or is this a new heaven and a new earth—a wonder-land of beauty and brightness and song, from which the stroke of a magician’s wand shall cast me back again into outer darkness? No, no; this is the same world of yesterday, but I read it by the light of a new revelation. It is Rose’s world—and I love her—I adore her!”

I turned and looked back. I saw the deep groves in which F—— lay embosomed. Her beautiful image seemed to stand out from the background of their dark masses. I scattered the leaves of the divining flower to the breeze that blew towards her, murmuring, with an unconscious alteration, the sweet words of Waller—

“ Go, lovely Rose !
Tell her that shares thy name with thee
That now she knows,
When I compare her unto thee,
How sweet and fair she seems to be.”

Then I turned and rode away.

CHAPTER VI.

"The banquet, where the meats became
As wormwood, and *he* hated all who pledged."
—TENNYSON.

It was late when I reached the camp—that is, from a mess-going point of view; and as I entered my hut the last bugle for that festive meal was sounding—that tocsin of the soul to how many worthy fellows who carry their souls in that part of the body where the Dutch theorist placed the living and thinking principle of all mankind. To-night it was for me no tocsin of the soul. Eat dinner to-night!—impossible. The thought was almost nauseating. I would go to mess, though. Delightful as my thoughts were, I would go to mess that I might enjoy them the more by contrast afterwards. Having dressed with all speed, I tenderly placed the jessamine sprigs in water, and finding no button-hole in my open red jacket wherein to bestow the geranium, I cut a place for it, inserted my treasure, and, thus decorated, repaired to the mess-room.

Dinner was pretty well advanced when I entered; but instantly there was a lull in the conversation, and certain indications in the faces of the less sophisticated told me at once that I had myself been the immediate subject of conversation.

"Ah! here you are, Bruce," said the senior Major. "We were just saying, 'what has become of our

model of punctuality?" I hope" (with a grin) "you're better?"

"Better, Major!" said I, sitting down; "what do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. I heard you were ill this morning."

"I never was ill in my life."

"Well, Leslie there told us you were ill."

There was a general titter round the table. I saw how it was. Master Jack, having himself been "*ebrius Baccho*," had been making an amusing story about me, and transferring to me (with the common weakness of the overtaken) his own transgressions. At another time I would have laughed, but not so to-night. I fixed Jack with a stern eye.

"You said I was ill, Leslie, did you? Why?"

Poor Jack looked very red and unhappy, and said, "Well, you know you were very queer last night."

"What do you mean by *queer*, sir?" I inquired, in a dangerous voice.

"Why, Donald, don't snap my nose off. You know you were uncommonly crusty last night, and that's peculiar with you, you know; for no one ever saw you out of temper before"—(the truckler!). "And then when I went to your hut after parade this forenoon you were still in bed, and that's peculiar with you, you know; and then when old 'Pilot,' the Major's dog, came quietly in to say 'good-morning,' you threw a candlestick at the old beggar, and that's peculiar with you; and then you swore at me when I said 'shame,' and that's—well, that's not common with you; so when I went away

I said, and I never doubted, ‘This poor, dear Donald is ill, you know,’ and I told the Major and—and others, you know.”

A great shout of laughter rang down the table, giving fresh revelations of Jack’s antecedent narrative. I joined in it, but grudgingly; for I felt that I did not like these liberties. There was a coarseness about them I had not noticed on previous occasions. There was a coarseness about the whole thing to-night. The Major’s whiskers, I noticed, looked exceptionally coarse, the thumbs of the mess-waiters grasping the dishes they offered were eminently unsatisfactory, and the doctor’s method of feeding himself simply revolting. The conversation, too, sounded so stale. Who the dickens, who cared to know, did *not* know that the odds against Bucephalus had gone from sevens to eights? and yet Brittles and Tomkinson repeated the statement six times each before the joints had been disposed of, reiterating on each several occasion, “By Jupiter Jingo! I wouldn’t be in Lord Welsher’s shoes;” and why discuss Miss Furtado’s eyes and other features for ten solid minutes? We all know she is a charming actress, and has beautiful physical as well as dramatic traits, but why go on with her eternally? Why not talk of the Colleen Bawn, or Patti, or Miss Herbert, or Miss Oliver, or Miss Nelly Moore, or Marie Wilton, or some one else of at least equal distinction? Why hammer, hammer on one eternal topic? Damme! it was insufferable to-night. And that old ass M’Snorter, our Highland Major, whose only ideas were heather, haggis, and hollow squares—why should *he* say, in

contradiction to me, that the late Duke of —— did not regret his great purchases in the north, when I knew to a certainty—I may almost say from himself—that he *did?* It was most irritating. And Snoaker, too, what did *he* know about politics? The shape of a cue, or a ballet-girl's ankle, were subjects on which he was entitled to a respectful hearing; but as to whether the franchise is a right or a trust—pshaw! what business had he to grapple with *me* on a subject of that sort?

Altogether mess seemed different to-night, and the coarseness, the wearisomeness, the flatness, the baldness, the ignorance, the iterativeness displayed in the conversation, had never presented itself to me before; and yet Snoaker, Brittles, Tomkinson, M'Snorter, *et hoc genus omne*, were they not to-night in possession of the same intellectual brilliancy which had illustrated them for the last decade? Revolving these thoughts, I sat at meat with a scourge-like expression of countenance.

“Donald Bruce has become a swell!” cried a voice from one end of the table.

“As how?” I inquired, full of watchful irritation.

“Who ever saw you with a bouquet” (the beast pronounced it “bucket”) “at mess before?”

“Yes,” said the Major, “I've been looking at that.”

“Have you?” I sneered. “I thought your botanical interests were confined to the thistle.”

I said this with so much “*intention*” that there was a general look of surprise, for I was commonly a placable and easy-going mortal.

“When Scot meets Scot,” muttered a neighbour.

Now, if there is one association of men in which more than any other a sulky fellow or a man out of temper is unmercifully dealt with, that association is a regimental mess. There is no quarter to be found there for splenetic moods. Good-humour and blithe freedom of speech pervade the atmosphere; and he who violates the one or resents the other brings an old house about his ears ; and so I did. Chaff of all sorts, light and heavy, played upon me like a hail-storm.

“The mess-president” (I then occupied that post), cried one, “has been settling with the green-grocer and getting discount.”

“Is it to be a standing perquisite, Bruce ?”

“Yes ; can we hope for this splendour every night ?”

“Or is it only a sample from a new tenderer ?”

“I’d be hanged if I’d take it out in mere geraniums.”

“Leave a canny Scot to make his own bargain ; to-morrow night we shall have a camellia.”

“Hadn’t we better ask the General to dine some night when we can be sure of the camellia ?”

“Seriously, Bruce, where did you get it ?”

“Don’t ask him ; he’s looking savage. To-morrow beer will have risen a halfpenny a glass.”

“As to thistles,” said the Major, who had all this time been excogitating a sarcasm in his turbid soul —“as to thistles—why, as to thistles, it strikes me, Captain Bruce—it strikes me that the less *you* say on that subject the better ;” and he delivered his artless “*tu quoque*” with a look of triumphant indignation, as who should say, “*Habet !*”

The Major's delightful imbecility evoked no small mirth, and when it subsided, the professed lady's-man of the regiment remarked, "You lost a golden opportunity there, Major, of annihilating Bruce with even more brilliancy!"

"What do you mean?" growled the Celt.

"Don't you know the language of flowers?"

"Language of flowers! I should think not. Stuff! why?"

"Because, you know, the geranium, if given by a lady to a fellow (which in Bruce's case is, of course, absurd), conveys much the same idea as he wished to express about you when he spoke of the thistles."

I pricked up my ears.

"I don't understand you," said the Major.

"Why," said the lady's-man, "every flower, you know, has a meaning: if a lady gives you a myrtle, for instance, that expresses 'I love you constantly'; or a rose, that says 'I love you to distraction'; but if she gives you a geranium——"

I looked at him with a hungry intensity.

"Don't look so fierce, Bruce; you quite frighten me."

"No, no," I said, with a forced laugh; "go on—let us hear the nonsense. What does the geranium say?"

"Well, the geranium says—not I, mind—the geranium says, like Dr Johnson, 'Sir, you are an ass!'"

A pang shot through my heart, but with a desperate effort I controlled myself, and said, "And pray where did you learn all this?"

"Learn it, my dear fellow? read it in the book, of course."

"What book?"

"'The Language of Flowers,' to be sure."

"You don't mean to say that nonsense of that sort is published?"

"It isn't nonsense; but 'The Language of Flowers' is published, and a very nice useful little book I find it, I can tell you."

"I should rather like to see the rubbish," I said, carelessly.

"Oh, I'll show it you any time!"

And I resolved that he should have a very early opportunity of doing so. The conversation now dribbled into our common domestic channels.

M'Guffig of the band had burst a blood-vessel in blowing that tremendous brazen serpentcleide; steel scabbards were certainly going to be introduced for infantry at last: at last! high time too: what an unutterable mull the Colonel made of that new deployment yesterday: there was to be a fortnight's leave for grouse-shooting on "the twelfth," and no "Returns" for the grousers: that was the Brigadier's doing: what a brick he was! but then he was a Guardsman, and Guardsmen's ideas on the subjects of leave were thoroughly sound and practical.

"Tommy Hawk wasn't really going to trot his grey cob, 'The Scalper,' against old Feedle M'Doo's 'Ring-tailed Screamer'?"

"Yes, he was."

"Then the 'Screamer' must be handicapped?"

"No, he mustn't."

"Yes he must—heavily."

“Time would show.”

“Some people think themselves so confoundedly knowing.”

“How well Tommy Hawk shot in the big match at Ashburnham !”

“Nearly won it.”

“Would have won it if he hadn’t drunk eleven brandies-and-sodas the night before.”

“Nonsense !”

“Fact.”

“Awful fellow to drink, Hawk !”

“Deuced clear-headed fellow, though !”

“Oh, deuced ! and his billiards—something like, eh ?”

“A fellow had arrived that day would see them all at billiards.”

“Who ?”

“Burridge of the —— Dragoon Guards.”

(Burridge of the —— Dragoon Guards ! my heart gave a thump at this intelligence.)

“Oh ! had they come in ?”

“Yes, the last squadron came in that morning.”

“Burridge would see them all at billiards.”

“Give any man ten.”

“What ! even Brittles ?”

“Yes, even Brittles.”

“Then he must be a nailer.”

And so on *ad nauseam*.

At last mess broke up ; how insufferably wearisome it had been ! and what difficulty I had felt in concealing my irritation, my *ennui*, my disgust !

“A rubber to-night, Bruce ?” asked the Major, as I was leaving the mess-hut.

A rubber to-night ! in the anteroom, where also there was a piano, and where that noisy Snorkins would reproduce for two hours the stale buffooneries of the music-halls. A rubber to-night ! with such an *entourage* !—that Major was becoming too insufferable.

Arrived in my own hut, my first care was to look after the health of my jessamine. I experienced a shock. The “soldier-servant” is, in many respects, a useful institution ; sometimes sober, frequently honest, very generally industrious, and always willing ; but his ways are not as other men’s ways, nor his thoughts (when he has any) as other men’s.

My leal and trusty retainer observing, no doubt with surprise, the sudden indication of a floral taste in the glass on my dressing-table, had evidently thought to gratify me by enriching the, in his eyes, rather meagre collection ; and gathering from the little garden which is now a common adjunct to the soldiers’ huts at the camp, a bunch of gaudy and graveolent flowers, had crammed them in beside the adorable sprigs of jessamine.

Had the fellow been present at the moment, I believe something approaching homicide would have been done on his person : as it was, I snatched his offering from the sacred shrine which it profaned, was trampling under foot the contaminating vegetables with horrible imprecations, when a deep voice remarked, “Ave you smorged him ? A beetle—was it ? ”

By all the thunders ! Blackstock again ! His shaggy head was thrust familiarly through the win-

dow, and, accepting him as a ram caught in the thicket, I swooped upon him accordingly.

"What do you mean by prying into my private room, *Mister Blackstock?*" I inquired, indignantly.

"No hoffence, hold fellow," said the astonished Blackstock, who had done so unrebuked fifty times—"no hoffence; I was just passing round the 'uts, and saw a light in yours, and looked in to see that hall was right."

"Well, all *is* right; are you satisfied?"

"Ho! certainly."

"Good-night, then."

"Wy, Bruce, wot's come to you?"

"An unwelcome visitor," I snarled.

"'Ow 'av I got your back up, my dear boy?"

"You needn't 'dear boy' me, Mr Blackstock; and now, if it is quite convenient, perhaps you will bring this intrusion to a close."

"Ho! hintrusion is it? ho! to be sure—I forgot; I should 'ave remembered my horigin: I won't forget again, I promise you;" and, surprised and indignant, the Quartermaster flounced away from the window. Immediately I felt that I was a ruffian and a snob, and rushed out to call him back and apologise; but the worthy fellow was too much offended, and marched away into the darkness, tossing his head like an infuriated drum-major. I would make it all right with him to-morrow, I thought, and, calmed with my thunderstorm, proceeded to replace the water in the flower-glass which had been contaminated by my servant's contribution.

This had been a tumultuous day following a

tumultuous night ; I seemed to be cut off by centuries from the life of a week ago. Objects of the highest interest then were distasteful now, and things then indifferent had become revolting. I had heard of love at first sight ; I had heard of it only as a more violent development of an imbecility which could never personally affect me. If I had speculated on it at all, it had been in a scoffing and sceptical spirit ; and now—well, now faith came, because the existence of such a phenomenon was proved to demonstration in myself. Was I ashamed of it ? No ; I accepted it as a devotee accepts a mystery—inexplicable, unfathomable, but, above all things, true. I had never been similarly affected, but was that strange ? No ; I was fastidious, perhaps, and insensible, and it required the most powerful of magnets to draw forth the latent capabilities of my nature. But then had I not been subjected to such an influence ? Oh yes ! who could resist her ?—this creature, so mysteriously attractive—so clothed in harmony and grace ? Then came an unpleasant gleam of recollection about the geranium, and I looked doubtfully at the flower, but only for a moment. Pshaw ! what trumpery nonsense !—the babbling of that ass Peterson at mess ; was I to be affected by that ? The language of flowers !—childish rubbish. What did Lady Rose know about it ? Hem ! ha !—well, suppose she did—what then ? She was infinitely playful and sportive ; it was but a genial little sally, and she was too well bred to have made the innuendo unless she had felt the irony of it. In that point of view it was complimentary ; very much so

indeed. So I promoted the geranium to a place beside the jessamine, and went to bed in content.

The next two days were passed, one in a long field-day, the other in a tedious court-martial, during which the preoccupation of my thoughts sadly interfered with the efficient discharge of my duties. It was not till the afternoon of the second day that I could make my escape from the camp, and then, need I say that I turned Captain Crosstree's head in the direction of F——? The jessamine and geranium both looked rather fading and thirsty, so I took them out for an airing in my button-hole. I would go, I thought, and drop in, according to Badger's invitation, at the Hermitage. I *would* go, I was entitled to go, I must go. It was but civil to inquire after Miss Richmond's health, and I hadn't been there for ever so long—why, not for forty-eight hours at least! Badger would be hurt if I didn't go; and I would go. So on I rode, and I rode on, passing rapidly through the scenes of my mental conflict, through the revealing woods and meadows, and down the unforgotten hill, seeing with a thrill the first glimpse of the dark woods of F——, which were for me an oasis indeed. When I came to Mr Lewis's house, I began to experience new sensations—fear, shame, shyness, a lumpiness about the throat, a faintness about the heart, an indescribable impulse to turn back and go campwards at the top of Crosstree's speed. I overcame it. "Courage!" I said to myself, "the visit is perfectly in form; I am going to visit Badger." I repeated the last words several times, and went on. Ha! there was the Araucaria. "I am going to 'visit Badger.'" There

was Pan. "I am going to visit Badger." Oh! what was that? "I am going to visit——;" but I wasn't; for a moment after I found myself sweeping past the Hermitage at a sharp canter, my face burning, my eyes fixed on Captain Crosstree's ears; and not till F—— lay a good half-mile behind did I draw rein.

POLTROON! IMBECILE! IDIOT! how I abused, how I despised myself: I a lover! of a worthy type, indeed. I, a great hairy soldier, to blush and tremble and run away like a thief from the house where of all others I wished to be. I would go back; but then, perhaps, I had been seen passing, and, indeed, I had had a vague tail-of-the-eye impression of white dresses on the lawn. What then? I must go back some time; there was no other road. I couldn't spend the rest of my life half a mile on the wrong side of F——; and did I always mean to fly from Rose like this? No, of course not; but why hurry? where was the call for hurry? I would saunter on a while and enjoy the delightful air, and then go back. So I did saunter on, and did at last prevail upon myself to turn back. I turned just before coming to a sharp angle in the road, and had hardly done so when I heard the sound of horses' feet briskly cantering behind me. The horse was apparently pulled up short on getting to the head of the road. I myself pulled up, almost involuntarily, to see who was behind me, and the next moment found myself confronted by Miss Mary Richmond.

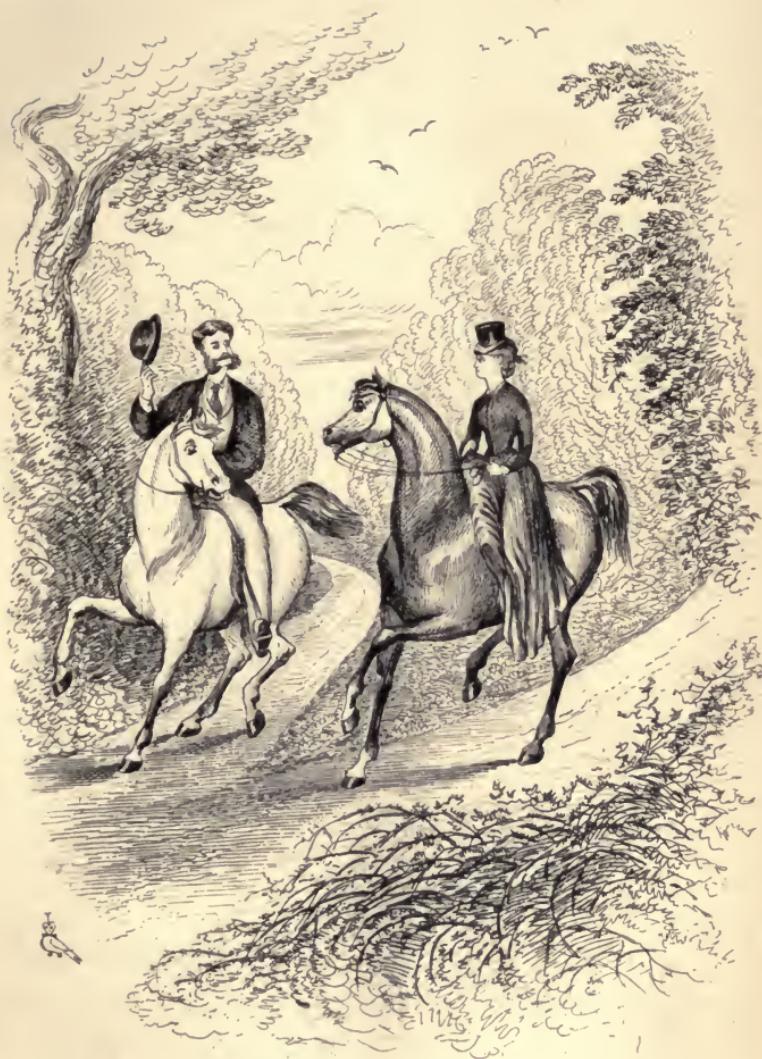
It was profoundly unpleasant, but there was no

escape for either, unless the young lady took her horse over a stiff "post-and-rail" on the left, or I mine over an eight-foot fence on the right.

I felt almost overwhelmed with the awkwardness of the meeting, but did my best to take my hat off with an air of unconcern, feeling far more for her than for myself. Woman-like, however, she showed herself much more equal to the situation than I did. She bowed gravely but politely, and I drew my horse aside to let her pass. Instead of doing so, however, she reined up beside me, and said,—

"I have wished to see you, Captain Bruce, as I have to apologise for having twice placed you in an awkward position. How annoyed I have felt at having made such a scene the other night, you will, I am sure, easily understand; but I hope you will also make allowance for the very painful position I was placed in on discovering the mistake I had made that fatal night at the opera, when—though I can hardly expect you to believe what sounds like an impossibility—your wonderful likeness, at a little distance, to a gentleman with whom—who is—that is to say—he is an intimate friend; and then the note I wrote you——"

"Pray make your mind easy about that, Miss Richmond," I said; "it is paying your handwriting a poor compliment—but the light was bad too; anyhow, your note was unintelligible; and being much engrossed in the music (for I am music-mad), and feeling sure it was a mistake, I am afraid I was ungallant enough not to take much interest in it, and tore it up mechanically, while listening to that divine



An Explanation.

air Patti was singing at the time, without understanding a word of it."

Not strictly true, perhaps; but if the end can, in any case, justify the means, this falsehood was justified.

She looked at me sharply for a moment, then smiled kindly, and said,—

"I understand; thank you. Now, suppose we trot on, we shall be just in time for tea; you'll come and have some, won't you?"

I could not refuse such a pretext and such an opportunity, so we trotted on amicably together.

On reaching the Hermitage, we found Badger in the act of arriving from his daily visit to town. His wife and Lady Rose were on the lawn receiving him, and I was in the middle of the group before I had time to become frightened.

"Which of you is it?" roared Badger, who loved and appreciated his own joke.

"The Impostor," I replied, and Badger's ribs were imperilled.

"Well, come away in; send your pony to the stable. Now I've got you, I'll keep you. You must stay and take pot-luck with us."

I muttered something about my dress.

"Oh, dress be hanged! if it wasn't for that cat Polly and her finery I would dine in my dressing-gown and slippers."

"I shouldn't wonder if you went farther, uncle, and dined without them."

"I wish I could. If I was quite alone I would dine in nothing but my spectacles."

"How is Captain Crosstree to-day?" said Lady Rose, again honouring this singularly favoured animal with her notice and her caresses.

"Captain Crosstree has become insufferably conceited since you adorned him the other day," I replied.

"Ah, poor fellow! he shall have a new bouquet to-night. You have no flowers to give him at the camp, or they must be dusty sickly flowers if these are specimens you have in your button-hole, Captain Bruce; how can you wear such melancholy-looking objects?"

Crosstree's stolen jessamine sprigs and the doubtful geranium! I had forgotten all about them. Would that the Badgerian lawn might open and whelm them and me in everlasting oblivion!

"Ah! these are some—these are some flowers——"

"Were, I should say," replied Lady Rose.

"Yes, they are a little withered; but I can't afford to part with them just now—not till they are replaced," said I, making a wonderful rally.

"Oh, you're begging! Well, I see something suitable in the middle of that plot, but no one dares tread that sacred ground but my uncle. His foot is so light and fairy-like, you see, it leaves no mark. Uncle, dear, please fetch that heavenly peony, and give it to Captain Bruce."

Uncle Badger brought the thing (it was as big as a Portugal onion), and I was obliged ruefully to deck myself withal, affecting gratitude, which Lady Rose demurely accepted.

"You didn't have a very long ride, Captain Bruce?" she said.

"N-no, not very."

"Do you always ride as you did to-day? You can't pick up many impressions of the scenery."

"Ah! you saw me, did you?—the fact is, there was a court-martial to-day, and—"

"Oh! and you sentenced the man to be hanged, and are a prey to horrible remorse, and were riding with fixed eyes, like Macbeth seeing the ghost: do you see him now?"

"No; how could I *here*? but the court-martial was very long and tiresome, and the room very hot, and after it was over one felt the necessity of fresh air and rapid motion."

"My aunt and I were standing at the door as you passed, and we were quite frightened; you looked exactly as if you were going for a doctor: there was no one really much hurt, was there?"

"I beg your pardon, I don't quite understand—where?"

"How should I know?" and she flitted away into the house—playful, teasing, but inexpressibly an angel!

I believe Badger's dinner was excellent; he was in high spirits, and uncorked freely both his wine and his jokes—the age of the former atoning in some sort for that of the latter. He was in high spirits; a new listener—what a boon to a talkative man with a limited *repertoire*! What a boon I was to Badger! And as for myself, I was well pleased to sit and listen dreamily to his babblement, while my spirit was far away in a delightful dreamland. We did not go into the garden after dinner, we went into the drawing-room, and there found the three ladies. Miss Rich-

mond certainly looked not exactly sad, but her whole style suggested the idea of a creature who *ought* to be all sparkle and sunshine, and she certainly was not *that*; she looked wearied, *ennuyée*, springless; and it was only now and then, in reply to the rallyings of her uncle, that she flashed out into what were evidently her real characteristics. Poor Mary! she was a beautiful creature, and the suggestion of a secret sorrow increased the interest of her appearance.

"Rose, dear," she said, after tea, "Captain Bruce is music-mad, and so am I; do, pray, soothe our dark spirits with some of your wonderful songs."

"Oh! pray do, Lady Rose," I seconded.

"I shall be charmed," she replied; "but in what mood am I to encounter your dark spirits? Grave or gay?"

"Oh! a little of everything, from grave to gay, from lively to severe."

"Grave for Polly, gay for myself, lively for my uncle, and severe for the gentleman who has spent the day in condemning his fellow-creatures to all sorts of pains and penalties." She seemed to remember little things about me; I liked that.

For the next hour I was in Elysium. What a voice she had! a beautiful soprano, in which she poured forth a selection, indeed such as we had named; now a gem from Verdi or Rossini, now a gay Neapolitan, now a wild Andalusian air; but I preferred her in those songs from which real genius and true feeling can draw such "heart's-own-country-music," the wild, the pathetic songs of her fatherland.

I was in the seventh heaven.

An Evening at the Hermitage





CHAPTER VII.

"One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons,
A natural perspective that is, and is not."

—*The Twelfth Night.*

"A Board will assemble in the South Cavalry Barracks to-morrow forenoon at eleven o'clock, for the purpose of examining and reporting upon the condition of a hay-rack in G stable there.

President.

CAPTAIN BURRIDGE, Dr. Gds.

Members.

CAPTAIN BRUCE, —— Fusiliers.

LIEUT. ROPER, the Royal Welshers."

This was the announcement which I read in my order-book lying open on my table when I got home that evening. At last, then, I was to meet this man ; at last I was to speak to him, a man whom, years ago, I had regarded merely with a half-comic animosity, but who had involuntarily been the cause, within the last few days, of altering the whole complexion of my life and my ideas. But a week ago the rencontre would have been looked forward to as, at most, the subject of a joke ; and now I could not but regard it as a matter of interest—as, somehow or other, a link in a chain of important events ; for I had formed a hazy sort of half resolution, half pre-

sentiment, that Burridge should be made to subserve what had suddenly become the engrossing object of my thoughts.

At the appointed hour next forenoon I duly repaired to the Cavalry Barracks, and on inquiring at the orderly-room as to the place where the Board was to assemble, was referred to G stable as the place where its members might probably go, in the first instance, to examine the subject to be reported upon. I found no symptoms of a Board at G stable, and accordingly "drew" the mess-room for Captain Burridge. Captain Burridge was not there either, but I ascertained that his quarters were No. IV. C staircase, and in about a minute I was knocking at his door. Successful at last; a voice shouted, "Come in," adding, as I turned the handle of the door, "if you are not a dun or a pay-sergeant," and I was in the presence of my "double." He was considerably altered since I had last seen him five years ago. He was stouter and redder (was I stouter and redder too?), and these five years, aided by care, climate, or dissipation, had registered themselves pretty legibly in the lines about his mouth and eyes. Here and there, too, in his high-coloured whiskering, might be detected the tares which Time, the enemy, had prematurely begun to sow. He was lounging in an arm-chair by a window, smoking a cigar, and playing with a terrier. His body was enveloped in a loose dressing-gown, and on his head was a smart smoking-cap; the equipments of his legs and feet—regimental overalls with boots and spurs—were the only indications that he contemplated professional occupation that

day. He sat up when I entered, and looked at me pretty stolidly.

"Captain Burridge, I think?" said I.

"Oh, of course; you know that just as well as I know you're Captain Bruce. Good morning; sit down," and he kept looking at me with the gravity of an owl, silent, for about a minute. I was not going to be out-stared, so I followed his example, and scanned his countenance like a mesmerist, devoting my attention a good deal to his right whisker, which I took to be a weak point, from the presence in it of one or two very rampagious white hairs.

"A lark, eh?" he remarked at last, laconically.

"Where?" said I, resolved not to be outdone.

"Why, here," he replied.

"I protest I don't see it," I said; and again there was a silence, and we stared away like basilisks.

"It *is* a lark," he insisted again.

"Is it?" I said, shifting my attention to his nose, in which there was a slight appearance of heat.

"What a beggar you are to stare!" he said, breaking down in the lark theory.

"Is it wonderful?" I rejoined. This posed him, and he was silent again for a while, at length remarking,—

"I see you're like me."

"So ill-natured people used to say," I replied. A low gurgling in his throat seemed to indicate that he was amused, and he said, with more animation,—

"Come, that aint like me; I couldn't have said that. I said you were like me because you didn't seem to have any ideas."

I fairly laughed out at this, and Burridge gave a phlegmatic "haw, haw!"

"I had an idea, though, all the time I was looking at you—fact—I had two ideas."

"Yes?"

"Yes." And he submitted his boots, spurs, and overalls to a very searching inspection.

"What were they?" I hazarded.

"The first was, what a dam odd thing it is that you and I never made each other's acquaintance before; I suppose I hated you too much, though."

"You don't fancy the feeling wasn't reciprocated?"

"What! did you hate me too?" he cried, with some surprise.

"Like poison; and I'm not at all sure I don't do so still."

Again Burridge produced the same fat sounds of mirth, and relieved the intellectual strain he was undergoing by burning the terrier's nose with the end of his cigar—a process which the animal resented with savage growls and snappings.

"You had another idea, hadn't you?" I inquired.

He disengaged himself from the dog, and vacantly asked, "When?"

"Just now, when you were staring at me."

"Oh yes, of course; I was thinking how you've aged, and how confoundedly yellow you've got. Am I as old and yellow?"

"As old and yellow? Why, you look as old as the hills; no fear of my being taken for you now. My father might—in fact, you rather remind me of him. As for yellow, no, you're not yellow, but you're worse

—your face is like a lobster ; I never saw anything so red in all my life—as red as your whiskers used to be before they turned white.”

“Really ? Upon your honour ? What a bore !” and he went heavily to the chimney-glass and closely examined himself.

“It’s all these three confounded summers at Bangalore,” he said, sorrowfully. “But, hang it ! red’s healthy, yellow isn’t.”

“But I’m not yellow.”

“Oh, the devil you arn’t ! I like that,” and he sank into his chair again. “You smoke ?” he inquired.

“I do.”

“Pipe or cigar ?”

“Cigar.”

“Thought so—have one ? Beer or brandy-and-soda ?”

“Brandy-and-soda.”

“Could have sworn it ! In a deep tumbler ?”

“In a deep tumbler.”

“With little bits of ice bobbing about in it ?”

“With little bits of ice bobbing about in it, if possible.”

He sat up interested—almost energetic.

“Now, I’ll make a bet you’re fond of Gruyère cheese ?”

I admitted it.

“And caviare ?”

“Yes.”

“And plover’s eggs ?”

“When they’re fresh.”

“And pickled oysters ?”

"Certainly."

"Exactly—all my own tastes; I suppose our palates are quite the same shape?"

"Perhaps."

"What's your Christian name?"

"Donald."

"Donald! what a name! Fancy being like a fellow with a name like that!"

"I consider it a very handsome name."

"No?" (with great earnestness).

"Yes, I do. Pray what is yours?"

"Adolphus."

"Adolphus!—hideously namby-pamby!"

"No, it's not, it's so soft; in Italian it would be Adolfo—that's pretty. If an Italian Marchesa was in love with me she would say, 'Adolfo mio!' or 'Adolfino mio!'"

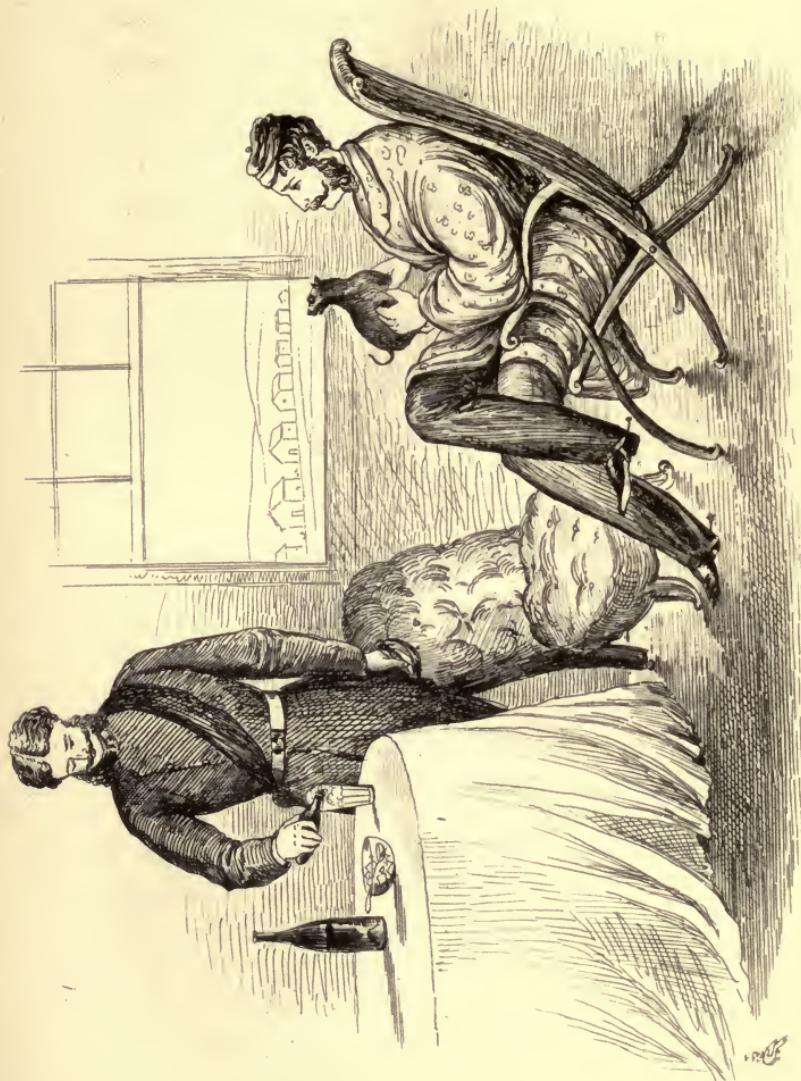
"Well, I suppose if an Italian Duchesa was in love with me she would say, 'Donaldo mio!' or 'Donaldino mio!'—twice as sonorous and musical."

"I can't say I agree with you. Here, Flyn! Flyn! bring a great deal of brandy and soda-water."

He certainly was a quaint specimen! He had that peculiar blending of stolidity and *naïveté*, of the elephant and the squirrel, of the imbecile and the humorous, and a certain kind of drollery which made it a toss-up whether one laughed *with* or *at* him, which I don't think is to be found in any other mortal save only the British Plunger—of which he was, in some respects, an exaggerated type.

"But," I said, these personalities being ended, "there was a Board, you know; how about it?"

L'Entierie cordiale



"Oh, that's all right! that ass Roper was here, and I sent him over to look at the stable, and he came back; but I wasn't going to have him hanging about in my quarters, so I told him to say what he thought of the rack, and he began a long yarn, but I cut him short, and when he had said it was 'in a horrid condition,' I gave him a weed and a glass of dry curaçoa and sent him away. After you've had your brandy-and-soda, we'll stroll over and look at the thing, and I'll show you a new horse I've just bought. How do you like this hole?"

"Oh, pretty well."

"Go much to town?"

"Not so much as I used to go from Canterbury, five years ago."

"Ah! you were too much in town then."

"That's what I used to say of you."

"What do you make of yourselves here?"

"Oh! there's rowing on the canal, and cricket, and rackets, and fives, and I ride about a good deal myself."

"It's too hot for all that; know any people hereabouts? Are they civil?"

"I knew no one till three or four days ago, and that puts me in mind that I owe you a dinner."

"How?"

"I ate yours the other day."

"You're chaffing."

"No, I'm not. I was asked to dine with a man I didn't know near F——, the other day, and I got into a wrong house where you were expected. The people only knew you very slightly—had hardly seen you, in fact; and, without knowing it, I passed for

you the greater part of the evening, and never suspected that I wasn't being entertained by the man who had invited me."

"That beats cock-fighting; who were the people? But, stay, I do remember getting a note on the march one day, asking me to dine somewhere; but I forgot all about it, and don't believe I even answered it. What was the man's name?"

"Badger."

"Yes, Badger, of course; some one asked him to be civil to me, he said."

"Old Timbrel did."

"What! do you know old Timbrel?"

"No, I don't, but I heard enough about him the other night; *he* was your friend."

"To be sure, he told me he would introduce me to a capital dinner: was it good?"

"A 1."

"And the people?"

"As jolly as possible."

"Were they savage about the mistake?"

"Quite the reverse; asked me back, and said they would ask you as soon as you came down, to have the fun of seeing us together and comparing notes."

"And it was a good thing to be in for?"

"Unquestionably."

"All right; when shall we dine with Badger?"

"He's sure to ask us as soon as he knows you're here; but, in fact, he told me to come any day and take pot-luck."

"What a brick! he must have an early benefit; is he old?"

"Oh yes, as the hills—looks older than you, even."

"Bar chaff."

"Yes, he's really an old fellow, with an old wife and a large fortune."

"Kids?"

"None."

"Any chance of his adopting a fellow?"

"I should say not; he has two nieces staying with him."

"Jolly girls?"

"Very."

"Pretty?"

"Beautiful: one of them, Lady Rose, is quite beautiful, though some people might, perhaps, admire her cousin Miss Mary Richmond—— hulloa! what's the matter?"

Burridge had bounced across the room, and seizing the unoffending terrier, then slumbering peacefully on the sofa, had begun to kick him round the table.

"The little beggar's always gnawing the bear's skin," he exclaimed. "Ah! ware mouthing—ware mouthing! will you do it again? will you? will you? will you?"

Eventually the dog was sent flying under the sofa.

"Ah, ha!" thought I—"rem acu tetigi; kick away, Captain Burridge—I see through you."

His face was very red and its expression much awakened at the conclusion of the dog episode; exercise might do that, of course.

"You said old Badger had nieces, didn't you?" he inquired, with a most elephantine attempt to recover his *insouciant* manner.

"Yes, Lady Rose O'Shea and Miss Mary Richmond—very nice girls both. By the by, you must have met Miss Richmond; her father is, or lately was, the General up in your last district."

"Ah! General Richmond; yes, I think—to be sure—a fair-haired girl?" he gasped.

"Very fair, indeed."

"Yes,—met her at the assize ball at—somewhere, and—and—take another weed, and let us stroll over to the stable."

We did so; we "sat upon" the hay-rack, condemned it in pompous language on portentous foolscap; we inspected Burridge's new purchase, and the rest of his horses; we then adjourned to luncheon in the mess-room: but Burridge was not again that day the Burridge he had been at eleven o'clock A.M. On leaving him I expressed a hope that he would come and "look me up," to which he very heartily agreed; but, on my suggesting that we should take steps for an early "pot-luck" with Badger in concert, he seemed to have changed his mind on that subject. "I've been knocking about too much lately," he explained—"too many big dinners; and then the march: I'm not quite myself just at present; and I'll not make myself known to Mr Badger yet awhile."

He didn't seem a bad fellow at all, but the contrary; and the expression of his face when Miss Richmond's name was mentioned, clearly indicated anguish and sorrow rather than guilt and shame. I felt sorry for him—in spite of myself I compassionated Burridge; but it was all very mysterious.

From this time my visits to the Hermitage were

neither few nor far between, and Captain Crosstree would have been astonished if his head had been turned in any other direction. Sometimes, as I approached the house, I had dreadful relapses of shame and shyness, but no other disgraceful panic-flight took place. I was enabled to conquer these feelings by contrasting present pain with the far superior horrors of subsequent desolation and remorse; for, in truth, to see Rose daily was a crying necessity, and the sun that went down upon a day when I had not seen her, was a sun whose rays had no brightness for me.

I developed immense cunning in devising pretexts for returning to the Hermitage. One day I had been enamoured of an air, and must borrow the music to have it arranged for the band; the next, I must ride back to ask some question on behalf of the band-master; the next day the music had to be returned, and it was—but minus a page; then the page had to be returned; then I would go without an excuse; then would come Badger's "pot-luck;" then Badger would dine with me; and (I blush to record it) one day I was mean enough to filch Badger's spectacle-case from the mess-room table, with the view of riding over with it next day,—and so on. Love laughs at locks and bars, and it wasn't likely he was going to be baffled in a case like this. I was, like Joe Bagstock, "amazing sly." Burridge not only fulfilled his promise of "looking me up," but became a constant *habitué* of my hut; indeed he occupied the vacant position of Blackstock, that unpeased Achilles continuing to sulk in his tent, "cherishing dark thoughts in his shaggy breast." Burridge, with

his plunging frankness, swore he had taken a violent fancy to me—said it was a kind of Corsican brother feeling; and ere many days begged to be allowed to celebrate the commencement of our friendship and endear our future relations by addressing me as “Donald,” “Donaldo,” or Donaldino;” and this boon being conceded, he necessarily became “Adolpho,” “Adolphino ;” or “Dolly.” A fortnight ago I could as easily have conceived myself apostrophising Blackstock as “Blackstocko,” or “Blackstockello,” but times were changed. In my dreamy and abstracted mood it suited better that this heavy and *insouciant* dragoon should lounge about my hut, careless whether his stolid remarks and harmless prattle were responded to, than that Blackstock, full of eager, vulgar animation, should clamour for my attention while he discoursed of “pivots” and “points of appui,” of “knapsacks,” “sea-kits,” and the enhanced price of blacking. There was a gulf between me and all that sort of thing now, and a hedge of roses through which I could not look back. Burridge was a welcome visitor. I soon found that his presence in my hut was like the undisturbing presence of a docile dog, which gives one all the advantage of solitude without the forlorn feeling of being quite alone. He dropped in almost every night after mess, and when I was in a humour to be spoken to, would inundate me with questions, all relating more or less to the subject on which alone I found conversation bearable at present. His good-breeding might have dictated this, but I soon discovered that he too was amazing sly. His questions invariably bore upon my visits to the Hermitage

—to the place itself—to its inmates—to their manners and customs; and the quaint approaches by which he skirmished up to his object were often most ludicrous.

“Badger in town to-day?” he would begin, carelessly.

“Yes, he was.”

“Very hot for him.”

“Very.”

“Fat, isn’t he?”

“Yes, decidedly fat.”

“He must feel the heat awfully?”

“Looks as if he did.”

“Drinks a lot of cooling stuff at dinner likely?”

“Oceans.”

“Claret-cup and things of that sort?”

“Yes.”

“And sleeps after dinner?”

“Sometimes.”

“Bore for you?”

“Oh no! I contrive to amuse myself.”

“Empty his bottles, eh?”

“No, I don’t drink much.”

“You sleep too, then?”

“No, I don’t; sometimes I go out into the garden.”

“Oh! I see; solitary weed among the flower-beds?”

“No, I seldom go out alone, and never smoke there.”

“Oh!”

“Never.”

A pause.

"Mrs Badger goes out with you, I suppose?"

"No, very seldom; she sleeps too."

"I forgot, you said he had nieces staying with him—
they go out with you then?"

"Yes, they go out with me."

"Nice girls, you said?"

"Charming."

"Jolly for you?"

"Not unpleasant."

"And after you go in what happens?"

"There is music."

"What! does *she* sing?"

"Who? Mrs Badger?"

"No, hang it!—that is, yes, of course."

"No, Mrs Badger snores."

"Badger doesn't sing?"

"No, Badger snores too."

"Snores too, ah! The nieces sing then?"

"One of them."

"What, what! the fair one? I mean Lady what's-her-name?"

"No, the fair one is Miss Mary Richmond, your old acquaintance, you know."

"Oh yes! the fair one is Miss Mary Richmond, my old acquaintance" (and he dwells lovingly on each letter of the name).

"She sings?"

"Never."

"Never!" and poor Burridge heaves a sigh and becomes silent; and, touched with a sudden sympathy, I recognise that the poor fellow's heart, filled like my own with love, requires, like mine, some daily susten-

ance, however small, to satisfy its intolerable cravings. This sort of thing went on for some time, till at last one night Burridge, plying his usual catechism, selected "dress" as his "cover" in skirmishing up to *the* object. He began by inquiring into the state of the Badger liveries; was anxious to know if the men wore gold garters; had had an idea that stockbrokers' servants always wore gold garters and red plush waistcoats; but perhaps Badger wasn't a dressy stockbroker: how was he as to that personally? Wore voluminous white waistcoats and immense gills did he? Voluminous white waistcoats did very well on big men; what should I say was Badger's measurement round the chest now? and then Mrs Badger's dress gradually came on the tapis,—the colour of her dress and cap-ribbons, *her* probable measurement round the chest, and so the ball passed on to Lady Rose. White—a pretty colour. Always wore white did she? It wasn't a colour, wasn't it? What the deuce was it then? And her ribbons? Violet? Pretty that for a brunette, but wouldn't suit her cousin by my description. Miss—Miss—, yes, Miss Richmond.

"No," I said, "she generally wears green ribbons."

"Green ribbons, does she? ah!" and Burridge's eyes stared dreamily into vacancy, as if he were conjuring up a vision of Mary with her sunny locks thus attired.

"And Lady Rose's ornaments?"

"Oh! very simple—a pearl cross to-night."

"A pearl cross!—chaste, that; and Miss—her cousin's?"

"Oh! she wore none. Stay, she had on something

I noticed to-night; yes, a plain thick gold locket, with some diamond letters on it."

"What! A E I?" exclaimed Burridge, springing up and upsetting the table.

"Yes, that was the word; but what is the matter?"

"My dear Donald, give me your hand! I'm not so utterly wretched yet. God bless you, Donald! You'll think I am mad. I daresay I am. I'll explain it all to you to-morrow—to-night I can't stay—A E I! A E I!" and he dashed out of the hut.

I was not the least surprised by this ebullition: I was prepared for it—I had seen it coming. Burridge was evidently brimful of love and sorrow, and his open and unartificial nature was yearning for a confidant. A very short time had sufficed to show me that if he appeared to Miss Richmond to be trifling with her feelings, in doing so he was involuntarily compelled to play a part most distressing and distasteful to himself; for that he loved her with the whole of his simple heart it required no sage to divine.

CHAPTER VIII.

"O Luve will venture in where it daur na weel be seen,
O Luve will venture in where wisdom ance has been."

—BURNS.

Love is said to be selfish. It is well said, for I fear it is very selfish. The engrossing passion draws, in the lover's mind, an isolating circle round the beloved object and himself, and the rest of his kind are only

thought of in so far as they can be used in ministering to the advancement of his wishes. Stray crumbs of charity may, indeed, occasionally fall from his table to the outer world ; but on examination it will be found that, by some subtle contrivance, they are merely taking a circuitous route to the altar of all his worship.

At first I had had a dim feeling in the case of Burridge that it might be made of use to me. I had never minutely considered how ; whether, foiled by the blackness of the Dragoon's villany, I was to stand forth in the eyes of Lady Rose as a being of extraordinary and shining virtues, or whether I was to unravel the tangled web of her cousin's sorrows and perplexities, and, by bringing Burridge to himself and restoring to Mary Richmond her lover, thereby make capital in favour of myself with Lady Rose, I know not. To-night as I went to bed I inclined to the latter theory, and felt it was well I should be Burridge's confidant. I felt kindly towards him. He was a good fellow. I might be able to help him, and thereby myself also—why not ? Such is the unselfishness of a lover.

The next forenoon Adolphus arrived at my hut on horseback.

"I want you to come, Donald," he said, "for a long ride. I have a lot to say to you, and in these confounded huts you can hear your next-door neighbour thinking. Come away out with me, where we can really be alone, and I can speak."

I complied at once, but Crosstree and I both experienced a pang of disappointment when Burridge in-

sisted that our heads should be turned away from F——. A day lost! a day without Rose! a day without a sun! Confound the fellow and his yarn! Such is the unselfishness of a lover. My companion rode along for a time in silence, not from stolidity, however, for he was evidently much agitated; but he was a veritable Anglo-Saxon, and we know what intolerable torture the verbal expression of any deep emotion brings to that remarkable race. Burridge was silent, then, at first, and it was not my part to commence the delicate subject. At last, after various shy sidelong glances and a cough or two, he did begin.

“Did you think I was mad last night, Bruce?”

“No, I did not—not the least.”

“I am going to make a confession to you.”

“I know you are—pray go on.”

“Miss Richmond, you know—I’ve been a hypocrite about her, Donald.”

“I know you have.”

“How?”

“Never mind—go on.”

“I knew her before, old fellow.”

“Yes, you said so yourself.”

“But I don’t mean in that way—at a ball, or a hundred balls; I knew her intimately.”

“Oh!”

“Tremendously intimately—in fact, couldn’t be more so. Why shouldn’t I tell you? I was in love with her, I am in love with her, I shall always be in love with her—there, you think I’m a fool, of course; what’s the odds?”

“I don’t think you’re a fool; I admire you, I glory

in you," I cried (thus wafting a little incense to my own private goddess).

"The oddest thing of all," he continued (and the foolish creature actually blushed), "is that she—she liked me tremendously, old fellow—loved me, I may say, like the very—ahem! Oh yes! Mary was as fond of me as I was of her—if that was possible—I do believe; wasn't it odd?"

"Very; but there's no accounting for tastes."

"Well, loving her as I did, and as I do, and as I swear, by George, I shall do, for-ever-and-everamen, what have I done but gone and broken her heart?"

"How?"

"I'll tell you presently: did you ever break a fellow's—that is, a girl's heart, Bruce?"

"N-not many. No, I'm not sure that I ever *quite* broke one."

"Ah! you don't know what it is to break a heart that you love, at all events, and a heart that loves you. Damme, it's awful, sir, to think of that girl!—the best little girl, the jolliest little trump in Europe, suffering and pining, as I know she is, and all for my fault—I who, to save her any sort of grief or trouble, would be glad to have red-hot rusty nails hammered into the small of my back by the farrier-major, or be shod with red-hot shoes like—like St Paul or some one, or have my flesh torn by wolves and wild horses, like Miss Menken—I mean Mazeppa; it's awful, Donald—it's intolerable. I haven't got many wits, you know, but I shall lose the few I have if this goes on much longer."

"But what is the reason of all this? if you love her

and she loves you, why should you break her heart ? If you can't afford to marry now, tell her so, and wait in patience ; better times will come soon. Uncle Badger is rich, and, after all, he and the General are but mortal, and——”

“ No, no, no—stop ; it isn’t that—that’s a trifle. I wish it was only that—I have plenty of money ; it can do me no good : but I’ll tell you the whole thing from the beginning.

“ Well, Donald, I was on detachment with my troop last year at B——, up in the north ; not a bad place, B——, the biggest trout you ever saw in a little lake there—great yellow fellows, running up to three and four pounds ; and you could hunt with three fairish packs ; and the shooting was capital, and there were some really good houses in the country, and altogether it was a good detachment, and I managed to keep it for a year, which was luck, as things go nowadays, you know. Well, there was a fellow Stainton—a married fellow—who had been in the Fourth, kept no end of a good house about four miles from our place, and was always glad to see a soldier, as old soldiers ought to be, and generally are. We were always there—Tom Carleton and Baby Williams and I—always. Fellows used to ask if we had moved our barrack-furniture over there ; and, upon my honour, I had two horses standing in his stables nearly half the winter : and then his claret—nothing but magnums—and the date, seldom younger than '48, and often older, and everything else, you know, in the same farm. It was no end of a billet, was Charley Stainton’s ; but I’m afraid he’s smashed in that

infernal bank thing—what was it? ‘I forget; but I suspect Charley *is* smashed, and there are no more coverts to shoot and magnums to drink for good fellows at B——; a bore, isn’t it? these banks are always——”

“My dear Adolpho, let’s get to the subject,” I broke in, foreseeing that either his discursive habits of thought, or a shyness about entering on the real topic, was likely to lead him into a maze of singularly uninteresting statistics. “Put the spurs in, old fellow, and face it. You met Miss Richmond there, at Stainton’s?”

“Yes, I did. The first time it was at an archery-party. I can see her now standing looking on under a big chestnut-tree, with a little white hat trimmed with blue and a feather. What do you call these birds, Donald, that can only be caught at night, in the dead of winter, on the tops of the highest mountains?”

“Upon my life I don’t know; but it doesn’t signify, does it?”

“No, no. Well, it was a feather out of one of these birds she was wearing, and looking so jolly. You know her eyes?”

“Intimately.” I had some reason to.

“Well, the moment I saw her eyes I felt—I’ll be hanged if I can tell you what I felt!”

“Oh! I can imagine.”

“All I know is, I saw nothing else all day—blue eyes, blue eyes, blue eyes everywhere. There was a carpet dance afterwards, and I was introduced. I felt such a fool, and she rather seemed to chaff me

(some girls go in for that at first, you know), but not so bad as she chaffed Baby Williams. He was trying to make the running with her, you know—a conceited young duffer, too. He had just exchanged to us from the Blues, and was telling her lots of fine things he had been doing at Windsor, and she said to him, ‘But what happens to your lessons all this time?’ and the Baby couldn’t understand, you know; and then she said, ‘I wonder the provost lets you out so much;’ and then the Baby knew what she meant, that she thought he was still at Eton, you know—ha! ha! ha! And wasn’t he disgusted? And I laughed, and she laughed, and the Baby went away in a rage, and somehow I felt better, and then we went in to supper, and got no end of friends. I thought she was an angel—and so she is, by Jupiter! and I’m the greatest ruffian in the hemisphere.”

“Get on, Adolpho, and please don’t trouble about details.” He was going to be a bore evidently.

“Well, I saw her again at church on Sunday, and then it was the same story—nothing but blue eyes, blue eyes; and she rather looked at me, I thought, and I was ashamed of myself for staring. I spoke to her when she came out, and she dropped her prayer-book, and then a flower she was carrying, and I gave her the book, but asked her to let me keep the flower—confoundedly impertinent, wasn’t it? But I couldn’t help it, and, I suppose, she saw that, for she let me keep it, although I suspect she was a little angry at first. Anyhow, I kept it, and wore it till it died; and, would you believe it? I’m wearing it now next my heart, and I will wear it there till I die.

I swear it. The next time I saw her was—let me see, where was it?"

"Oh! I don't think it matters," I broke in; "let us get to the results, my good fellow. It isn't necessary to recall every little incident."

"Yes, but there are some things I must tell you, you know. I don't quite remember where I met her next. It was immediately after, for she was staying first at Stainton's and then at another house in the neighbourhood, and there was a lot going on at the time. It was a picnic I met her next at, I believe. I remember Thornton, her father's aide-de-camp, was always hanging about her at it. I remember beginning to hate Thornton, though I had liked him before, and I was devilish glad when Tommy Carleton, by accident of course, let off a champagne cork into his eye and blackened it; and that was an odd thing to be pleased at, you know—so ill-natured, eh? Well, then, there was a dinner-party at Stainton's, and I took her in to dinner, and she was awfully jolly—seemed to take an interest in what I said, which nobody ever seemed to do before, you know, except my grandmother perhaps, who believes in me, and is a little touched in the upper story; and after dinner she sang something about a garden of roses, and I said something civil, and she looked queer and jolly, and blushed, and I felt queer and jolly, and I suppose I blushed too; and then neither of us spoke another word that night. When I got to barracks I said to myself, 'You've fallen in love with Mary Richmond, Adolphus, and you're the d—dest rascal out of the United States of America.'"

"But why?—why?"

"I'll tell you presently. Not long after that we gave a little dance in the mess-room at B——, and she came. We did it very well, I can tell you. Mrs Stainton came over and did hostess—a jolly old girl she was—and, of course, I was host. The people called me 'Paterfamilias,' and 'Papa,' I remember. Well, I suppose I was excited with the whole thing—entertaining the people, and so on—and rather lost command of myself, and couldn't conceal my love for Mary; and I kept asking her to dance with me, and she kept dancing with me, and people looked and giggled. I didn't care, and she didn't care; and she threw over Thornton, and that ass Ducksworth, the county member, and Tommy Carleton. At last she said, 'I really mustn't dance with you any more;' and I said I wouldn't dance another step that night then; and she said, 'What! not with Miss Mapleton?' (they had some humbugging chaff about Miss Mapleton and me); and I said 'No,' and went on talking a lot of nonsense about going into a monastery, and that sort of thing, for I was awfully excited. And then she said, Did I really care so much about dancing with her? and that there were many other better dancers in the room; and then I fairly blurted out, 'But there's only one YOU;' and she looked at me with such a look in her eyes, Donald, and then looked down, and I said, 'Never mind dancing, if you're tired; only sit down and let me look at you.' Then she said, 'But you can look at me dancing with anybody else;' and I said, 'I can't bear to see you dancing with anybody else; it's agony to me: I could



"But there's only one *YOU!*"

kill anybody else ;' and then somehow I found myself (scoundrel that I was) telling her that I was dying of love for her, and she said—— well, it don't matter what she said ; but at all events, Donald, she let me know that she was tremendously fond of me ; and I took a glove from her, and her card and pencil, and a rose from her hair ; and then Mrs Stanton came and said it was three o'clock—time to go ; and I didn't know whether it was three o'clock in the afternoon or three o'clock in the morning. Then she went away, and I remember I went into the supper-room and drank two tumblers of champagne, and sang songs ; and I remember a fellow saying, 'What's happened to you, old boy ? I always thought you were an owl before, but to-night you're as good as a play ;' and I felt mad and miserable and jolly all at once, for I knew I was a scoundrel. Oh Donald ! I can't tell you what I felt next morning when I woke up and saw her glove and her rose and all her things lying on the table. I thought I might as well take a pistol and shoot myself, for I had deceived her and cheated her like a low thief ; but I could not help it —upon my word of honour I couldn't—and I hadn't meant to do it ; but it was done, done, and couldn't be undone, for I was MARRIED already."

"MARRIED already ?"

"Yes, MARRIED already."

Neither of us spoke for some time after this astounding revelation. At last Burridge broke silence.

"You think me a scoundrel and a villain, Bruce, I know that, and I deserve it ; but I wasn't a designing scoundrel, and somehow I don't *feel* like a villain. If

you knew all you would make allowances for me; and if you knew the infernal grief I've suffered, I think you would be a little sorry for me, and perhaps not turn your back on me. I can't be surprised if you do, or blame you for it, of course; but it is a dismal thing, with all this trouble on a fellow's mind, to have no friend—not a soul in the world. And I have taken such a liking to you, old fellow; do you think you really must desert me altogether?"

There was a tear in the poor fellow's eye, a pathos in his usually stolid voice, and a simplicity about the recital of his sorrow and remorse that touched me, and might have softened an austerer moralist; and who was I to refuse this artless sinner my sympathy and my friendliest offices?

"Turn my back on you, old fellow!" I cried, "I will not; I am sure you would never designedly do anything cruel, or unmanly, or unlike a gentleman. I won't turn my back on you—depend upon that. I can see you must have behaved with terrible weakness; but we're all weak miserable sinners, and I won't preach, for the chances are I would have done the same or worse myself."

"Thank you, Donald; you wouldn't, I know, but you're a good fellow for saying so."

"Will you tell me about this—this deplorable marriage?"

"Of course I will—a half confession is no confession; you would not understand anything if I didn't, besides. Let us get off and picket the ponies, and sit down under this big tree. It's aw-

fully hot, and I think I can speak better when I'm sitting still."

We accordingly dismounted and disposed ourselves, he to tell and I to listen to Burridge's story.

CHAPTER IX.

"Lassù di sopra in la vita serena
Rispò' io lui, mi smarri' in una valle
Avanti che l'età mia fosse piena."

—DANTE, *Inferno*.

BURRIDGE'S STORY.

"When I first went into the army (I suppose you and I have about the same service), I was in infantry, you know, Donald—the —th Light Infantry—not a bad lot, but changed, as all the two-battalion regiments are now. Well, I joined the depot in Ireland, and had my head nearly drilled off; for it was at the beginning of the Crimean war, and they were drilling and shipping off as fast as they could. I was uncommonly glad, I can tell you, when I passed my drill, and was told off for the next draft for the seat of war. I was a very young ensign indeed, and if it was delightful to any of them to get away from the humdrum barrack-square and the eternal sergeant-major, it was delightful to me you may be sure. I'll never forget the night before we sailed from Queenstown—it was a great night altogether. We were all wild with delight at going to see the fighting. The old

birds hoped to make up for lost time, and all we youngsters expected to be captains in a month. I remember the only thing I regretted was, that I should be promoted too soon to have many chances of carrying the colours before the enemy. Ah! there was another thing I was sorry for—my brother Jack; he's dead and gone long ago, poor soul! He came down to see us off, and was tremendously cut up at parting with me; and seeing him so cut up cut me up worse, you know. I remember he said, ‘I’m afraid we’ll never meet again, Dolly!’ Dismal, wasn’t it? Of course he meant that I was safe to be killed; but I wasn’t; and he died of pleurisy.”

What a difficulty the fellow had in starting! Every straw seemed to act as a drag on his wheels; but, on the *vires-acquirit-eundo* principle, I let him have his head.

“We had a jolly voyage and glorious weather. All the sea—the Mediterranean, I mean—was crowded with ships and transports—strong fellows going out to be wounded or killed, and wounded fellows coming home to get strong or die. Every ship we met we signalled, ‘Has the place fallen?’ and when the answer came, ‘No,’ we all cheered like madmen. We were awfully impatient. When we got into the Black Sea everybody was in a fever; and I remember, when my servant called me at four o’clock one morning, and shouted, ‘Here we are at the war, yer anner! glory be to God!’ I rushed upon deck with nothing on but my shirt, and saw the sulky-looking rocks at the mouth of Balaklava harbour through a drizzling rain, and felt a little dashed, and thought to myself,

'Hang it! I'll never get away from this infernal place, alive or dead, either ;' and then there was a tremendous boom ! boom ! boom !—the first gun I ever heard fired in earnest—and I was as right and jolly as possible in a moment. But I beg your pardon, Donald, I forgot—of course you went through the whole thing yourself, and here I am yarning away like an old man-of-war's-man in his native village. I beg your pardon."

"Oh, don't mention it," said I; but my tone implied that any repetition of the sort of thing was not expected.

"Well, I needn't talk about the war. Of course I went through what was left of it, and paid two visits to the blessed Redan ; got out of that more frightened than hurt, ha ! ha ! Then, you remember, when the peace came none of us knew where we were going. I was horribly sold when the peace came. I liked the wild sort of life—didn't you ? but since it was come, I hoped we might be sent off to some wild sort of place, where there was lots of shooting and adventures with—with natives, and that kind of thing ; but I was sold again. I remember the colonel coming down to the mess-hut the night he got the orders about our move. He was looking disgusted. 'Where do you think we're going to, gentlemen ?' he said. 'Has the order come, sir ?' every one shouted. 'Yes, it's come. Can you guess where we're off to ?' Then we all began to sing out something—'Home,' 'Canada,' 'India,' 'Cape,' 'China,' 'Japan,' 'Mauritius,' &c. &c. No one ever thought of the Mediterranean, as our headquarters had gone from there to the war. After

there had been a lot of guesses, and every one wrong, the old major growled out—I can hear him now—‘Faith, I believe we must be going to the devil!’ and the colonel took the order out of his pocket and said, ‘That’s the nearest guess that’s been made yet, major; we’re going to Malta.’ Most of the fellows swore a good deal, for they had had enough of that kind of thing. I felt awfully sorry myself. I hated the idea of Malta; I couldn’t say why, exactly. I think it must have been a presentiment. Do you believe in presentiments, Donald?’

“More or less.”

“Well, I hated going there, but there we went; you’ve been there, I suppose?”

“Oh yes, frequently,” said I, fearing a minute historical and geological survey of the island.

“Well, it was a hot summer—intolerably hot; and they had invented the brigade system, and we were worried to death—drilled by the colonel, grilled by the brigadier, and eaten alive by the governor. It was abominable. I thought of taking leave; if I had I might have been all right now, but I didn’t, which was my bad luck. At last it was determined, well on in the season, to get up some garrison theatricals, and I went in strong for them. I don’t mean to say I could act, but I was fond of that sort of thing, and I supported the idea, and put my name down for a £50 subscription. I had more money than most of the fellows, you see, and they thought that immense, and put me on the committee at once. I liked that, and gave another ‘fifty’ for scenery. After that, the fellows suddenly seemed to think I was an authority,

and consulted me about everything ; and I liked that, for I was a youngster, you know. So when it came to be a question what we were to do for ladies, and some one suggested that the youngest-looking fellows should take the female parts, I pooh-poohed the idea, and said, ‘Nonsense, get ‘em out from London ;’ and when they stared and said something about its being salt, I said, ‘D—n the expense, I’ll guarantee another hundred ;’ and then every one cheered and said, ‘Bravo, Burridge !’ and it was settled. But they didn’t let me in for a whole hundred, for the governor and the brigadiers and other swells were put on their mettle when they heard that an ensign was shelling out for everything ; and the colonel got in a rage and cried, ‘D—n his impudence ! put *me* down for “fifty”—that’ll show him !’ Just as if I cared, and wasn’t as pleased as Punch to get his ‘fifty’ —the ridiculous old noodle !

“Well, we sent home to a fellow on leave to negotiate for a couple of actresses to come out for two months to play three nights a-fortnight. By this time it was late autumn, and before long we heard that two were coming out by the next mail—Miss Beatrice Armine and Miss Carlotta Seymour (jolly names, weren’t they ?) of the Princess’s, the Hay-market, the Adelphi, and the provinces—rather more than less of the latter, I suspect. Out they came accordingly. Beatrice Armine (Dick Winslow, who had been at Oxford, swore he remembered her under the name of Sue Mutton, daughter of a hair-dresser in the High Street) wasn’t a bad sort of little girl, good-natured, quite young, cheery, and rather

pretty, but she dropped her ‘h’s’ all over the place, and was a regular cormorant as far as garlic was concerned. As for Carlotta Seymour, she was—she was a showy woman—turned of thirty—ten years older than me. She was handsome, yes, she *was* handsome, but she had a bad face, cold and sneering; and then she set up for a genius and mystery. To hear her talk you would have believed that she was the daughter of a royal duke in disguise, and granddaughter of the Tragic Muse.

“Well, being on the committee, and standing a lot of tin and that, of course I got to know these women immediately; and I used to think it rather a swell thing to be always about them; riding with them, or standing them dinners at the hotel, or dropping into their rooms after mess and ordering in no end of suppers. Most of the committee used to come to the suppers too, but I used to pay—I preferred to pay, because I could patronise outsiders and take them in. I liked to say to a fellow, ‘Disengaged to-night, old boy? Dine with me at mess, and I’ll take you afterwards to see *the Seymour*, and *the Armine*; they’ll be delighted to see you as a friend of *mine*.’ And of course they were delighted, for every new fellow was sure to do something for them—give them a dinner or a drive, or a mount or something, you may be sure. So every one was pleased, and no one more than myself. I thought I was no end of a man of the world—quite a celebrated fellow in the garrison, and that every one was talking of me and my dramatic suppers—confounded little goose! and I remember being as proud as Lucifer

when even the colonel noticed it; and one night when I left mess rather early, his saying, ‘Is Dante going to his Beatrice, or Werther to his Charlotte?’ I knew in a kind of way that he meant the suppers, and I said, ‘Both, sir,’ and every one roared; and I began to think, and I *did* think, by Jove! that I was a clever fellow after all. Carlotta kept telling me I was, and of course she was a judge, I thought. I was rather inclined to cotton to Beatrice at first, but so was every one else, and it was a bore always struggling with a dozen fellows for who was to get next her and that. And at last one night Carlotta said she was astonished that a fellow of my ‘soul’ should go in for Beatrice; she was disappointed in me, she said, and that Beatrice was a vulgar uneducated little milliner and a designing toad, and that it was one of the trials of her lot to be associated with her, but that she was supported by the divine aspirations of genius; and then she cried a little, and told me about Beatrice’s garlic and ‘h’s,’ though of course I knew about them; and then she said that it had been one of her few comforts in this desolate island to believe that the only man with a spark of genius (meaning me, ha! ha!) had recognised a kindred spark in her—and so on. But now she saw she was mistaken, and must try to bear it as best she might. Then she cried again, and went on humbugging me, and I swallowing it all, till I swore I quite agreed with her about Beatrice (who had snubbed me two or three times, by the by), and that I recognised the spark of genius and all that, and thought her the cleverest and handsomest woman

of the day. She did look uncommon well, by Jove ! And then she asked to call me ‘Adolphus,’ and I was to call her ‘Carlotta ;’ and that was settled. And then she cried again, and thought I must ‘think her bold,’ and I said ‘No ;’ and she said something about ‘angelic boy,’ and Venus and Adonis, and a lot of gammon I didn’t understand, though I thought it all very fine. Then she came and sat close by me, and once, when she was crying (she had two or three rounds of that kind of thing), she dropped her head on my shoulder, and left no end of a white powdery mark on my shell-jacket. I know the old crocodile wanted me to kiss her, but I didn’t then. May the devil fly away with her ! After that she seemed regularly to take me over, and I could scarcely call myself my own master ; I wasn’t—but I was proud of it ; and as I rode along with her I liked to see fellows looking and grinning. I thought they were saying, ‘There goes Burridge, the lucky dog !’

“I was obliged to go out with her every day, and to see her to rehearsal and back from rehearsal, and to the play and back from the play ; and between the acts she required champagne, and would take it from no one’s hand but mine. I couldn’t leave her side for an instant but she was holloaing out, ‘Where’s Adolphus ?’ so it became a sort of byword in the garrison when anybody wanted anybody ; and one night Jack Whitecroft of the Artillery got screwed, and when Carlotta came on by herself as what-do-you-call-her, in the ‘Lady of Lyons,’ in a solemn part, he holloaed out, ‘Where’s Adolphus ?’ and the house nearly came down ; but I’ll be hanged if I wasn’t proud of that too.

"All the time I was tired to death of her, but she seemed immensely fond of me, and I was proud of that and the whole thing, and stuck to it. Her birthday came, and I gave a big dinner (it was her twenty-second birthday she said) in her honour, and presented her with a diamond bracelet. Then she asked me to write her some verses; I was ashamed to say I couldn't, so I got Travers to write some. He was an awfully clever chaffy fellow, and the poem was full of the biggest words you ever saw (I didn't understand a word of it); but somehow she didn't seem to like the verses, and said suddenly, 'On your honour, did you write this?' and of course I was obliged to say 'No,' and that Fred Travers had written them; and she would never speak to Fred again. Fred had put some of his horrid chaff in them, I suspect.

"As the time began to draw on for them to go away, she seemed to get fonder and fonder of me, and treated my opinion with immense respect, and kept asking me how I thought such and such a passage ought to be spouted, and what flowers and dresses she should wear. Then she asked my advice about her future plans. She was disgusted with her present life, she said—wanted to leave the stage, but didn't know what on earth to do. She could not go to her father; he had held high diplomatic appointments, but in a personal quarrel at cards with the Emperor of Russia he had permitted himself to strike his Majesty across the table. The result was, he had been sent to the mines in Siberia, and she was left friendless, friendless! then she would cry, and, by

Jupiter ! I believe I used to cry too. At last one day she said she had something very important to consult me about, but I must try to be calm—would I promise to be calm ? I swore I would, and she told me that she had just had an offer of marriage there—in the island—and that the suitor held the highest rank. He had never spoken to her, but had fallen desperately in love with her on the stage ; and his official position making it impossible for him to come to her personally, he had written offering her his heart and hand. She was not at liberty to divulge his name, but I might guess ; and said as much as led me to understand that it was either the governor or one of the brigadiers. Then she cried out, ‘ How pale you are ! ’—but I swear I wasn’t—and ran and got a big glass of sherry, and made me toss it off. Then she told me to be calm, and asked me if I could bear her to go on, and I said, ‘ Of course I could.’ So she went on and told me that *he* (meaning the governor or one of the brigadiers) was awfully jealous of me, and that his aides-de- — she meant his emissaries—were always watching outside the windows, and what should I advise her to do ?

“ Now, Donald, I didn’t care a straw about the woman, but somehow the idea of one of these big-wigs wanting to marry her made me prouder of her being so taken up with me ; and I didn’t like the idea of her marrying any one else—heaven knows why.

“ So I said it would be sacrificing her youth and beauty to—to something or other ; and she cried and said I had a noble soul, and that *that* was conclusive ;

and she tore up a pink note, which I supposed to be his note, and trode upon it, and bawled out, ‘Love conquers all !’ Then she gave me another big glass of sherry, and said she had felt certain my feelings would be outraged, and I vowed they *were* outraged, and that I should like to shoot the governor or one of the brigadiers. At that moment in came Beatrice Armine, and didn’t Carlotta look savage and drop into her ?

“Next day I got a fever, and was confoundedly ill. Carlotta sent me notes every day—two or three times a-day—and splendid bouquets, and oranges and things ; but I was ill for a fortnight, and before I was up again, or able to answer her notes, she and Beatrice had gone. Their passages had been taken by the committee, you see, and they were obliged to go. When I was getting round, the colonel came to see me—he was a kind old boy ; and after he had asked all about my illness and that, he said, ‘It was a lucky illness for you, my boy, and all your friends ought to be glad of it.’ I said, ‘Why ?’ and he said, ‘It saved you from that fiend of a woman, by all I can hear ;’ and I blazed out at the colonel, and told him he must retract that word, and he laughed good-naturedly, and said that if I did not like the word, of course he would, but that he was deuced glad she was off. That put me on my mettle, and I said that if it suited me to see her, of course I could still do so. And he said, ‘How ?’ and I said, ‘Go on leave, of course.’ Then the colonel’s back got up, and he said he would take uncommon good care I got no leave, if that was what I was going to be at, and left

me. I was a good deal spoiled by this time and savage, and sick of Malta, and I wanted a change, and perhaps I *did* miss Carlotta. So that very day I wrote and accepted an exchange I had been offered into the —— Hussars, then in India. The colonel couldn't stop that, you know. He was awfully good when I was going away. He said, 'I'm sorry you're going, Dolly, and we're all sorry; I think you're foolish, but every one must judge for himself. I wish you luck, and if you wish it for yourself steer clear of that theatrical friend of yours, my boy.' I wish to heaven I had! Well, I went home with six months' leave to England, and to join my regiment in India when that expired. I went to London first, and found Carlotta in swell rooms in Half-Moon Street. She had a jolly little brougham, and everything in great style. She was as fond of me as ever, but she said she was writing a tragedy and awfully busy. Charles Kean was to act in it, and was so impatient to begin that he gave her no peace: and therefore she could only see me at certain times, and mustn't be seen out with me, or Charles Kean would think she was idling, and it was so important to keep in with him. I smelt tobacco two or three times in her room, and one day saw no end of a swell cigar-case on her table, with an earl's coronet and the letter M on it, and she said Charles Kean had been there ballyragging her about her tragedy, and had forgotten it in his rage. Then I noticed to her that it was odd he should have a coronet and M on his case; and she laughed and said it was a good joke —a capital joke; that Kean had stolen it in fun from

Charles Matthews, who, she supposed I knew, had lately been made a count by the French Emperor for his masterly interpretation of Sir Charles Coldstream in French. Well, she was as fond of me as ever ; but there was so much bother and mystery and trouble about seeing her I got sick of it, and left town, and went away down to my grandmother's in Rutlandshire, promising, however, to see Carlotta before I left for India. I heard nothing of her for three months, and then, all of a sudden, her letters came pouring in day after day, and I was obliged to tell bangers to my grandmother about them. She was on the old tack again—wanted to consult me on a very delicate matter which could not be committed to writing ; and when was I going up to town, and how was I going out to India, what ship, and all the rest of it. I stayed down in Rutlandshire till the last moment ; I was going round the Cape in a steamer—I preferred that to overland—and I didn't get to town till two days before we were to sail from Gravesend. I found Carlotta in very dingy lodgings in Greek Street, Soho, this time, and she explained that she was living there to be near the refugees, that there was a conspiracy on foot to rescue her governor from the Siberian mines, and that she was plotting night and day with the refugees.

“ While I was with her a villainous-looking man, in his shirt-sleeves, with a short pipe in his mouth, put his head in at the door without knocking, and seeing me, grinned, tapped his nose, and went out, saying something about his name being ‘easy’ and his spirit ‘fly,’ in remarkably good English, though a

little vulgar I thought, considering he was a foreigner—Count Arnold Doldorouski, a Pole, she said, and a colonel of cavalry once, and who had sworn by the beard of Poniatowski, or some fellow of that sort, to rescue her governor from the mine, or perish in the attempt. I noticed that her room and the passage were all blocked up with trunks and boxes packed and corded, and I said to her, ‘You look as if you were on the wing, like me, Carlotta;’ and she said, ‘I *am* on the wing, and liker you than you think for,’ and laughed. Then I said, ‘Where are you off to?’ and she said, ‘I asked you six weeks ago to come up and give me your advice upon a very delicate subject, and you never came. I was dreadfully harassed, so I was obliged, for the first time since I have known you, to decide for myself. I’m going to India.’ ‘To India!’ ‘Yes, to India;’ and wasn’t it an odd coincidence? she said. But the strangest thing of all was, that she *was* going in the same ship with me—*there* was a coincidence for me, if I liked. *They* had actually taken her passage in the Golden Fleece! We agreed that perhaps it *was* the most extraordinary thing on record; and then I asked her what she was going to do in India. She said *that* was the delicate matter she had wished to consult me about—that she hoped I would really be calm, and not try to shake her resolution, for that it was all settled, and I had only myself to thank: she was going out to be married. ‘Married!’ But I didn’t seem to care twopence, and asked, ‘Who to?’ She said that she wasn’t at liberty to divulge the name, but it began with W, and perhaps I might guess

when she told me that he was a person of the highest official position in the civil service, who had got into trouble about indigo three years ago. But I couldn't guess ; and she said he had been home on furlough about that time, and having seen her on the stage, had fallen desperately in love with her, and had pined ever since in voluntary exile on one of the Himalayas, much to the regret of the Governor-General and Council, who had vainly attempted to get him to come down. At last he had written to her in desperation, and asked her to go out to him, saying, 'Restore me to my country and to myself !'

"What was she to do ? She had no friends. I would not go to her. The attempt to rescue her papa from the mine might be abortive. She was dissatisfied with this life, which was a precarious one. Kean had thrown over her tragedy. She was misunderstood and disappointed on every hand ; and she had resolved to cast in her lot in the far-shining East with one who had sworn to love and cherish her for ever.

"She looked very hard at me as she finished, and said, 'Don't try to dissuade me, dear Adolphus ! bear the pang—it is for *my* good.' And I said, 'I won't dissuade you ; I congratulate you with all my heart.' Then she gave a scream and fainted, and had hysterics—two or three, in fact—and the Count came back and put his head in and said, 'You'll have every blessed bobby in town about the house if you don't shut up that blarmed squalling.' Then she came to, at once, and said, 'Adolphus ! leave me ! I have been deceived in you—cruel, cruel man !' And I

said, ‘What the deuce have I done?’ and she stamped her foot and screamed out, ‘Go, viper!’ So I went; and the Count met me at the door and asked me to lend him five shillings, which I did, he remarking that she (Carlotta) seemed to be ‘a little spotty about the back,’ which I then believed to be a Polish idiom literally translated. Next day I got down to Gravesend, and got all my traps on board. There were only about five-and-twenty passengers, but no Carlotta among them. The time was just up, when a boat came off full of luggage, and there was Carlotta dressed like an archduchess and looking really stunning. She had a maid with her, who was as drunk as a fiddler, and had to be hoisted up with ropes and things. The Count was with her too, looking awfully seedy, all in black, with a frockcoat and a black stock, and no linen visible—which is rather a way Polish counts have, isn’t it? So they bustled about, and got her things stowed away, and her maid under hatches; and then the skipper holloaed out, ‘All shore-boats off!’ I heard the Count say to her, ‘Bye, bye; wish you luck—mind the rhino,’ which I thought deuced odd and familiar; and he scuttled down into his boat, and Carlotta put her head over, and said in a loud voice, ‘You’ll telegraph the first intelligence from Siberia.’ I only heard the Count’s answer indistinctly, there was such a row of steam and things, but it sounded like ‘Walker!’ and then, ‘the flimsies regular, or I’ll split—I will, by gum!’ She explained to me after, that they (the refugees and plotters) had a cipher and a cant language, which they always used in discussing political secrets, so I

concluded the Count must have been alluding to some of the arrangements for getting her papa out of the mine.

"The first night she only gave me a haughty bow, and wouldn't speak a word, and then for a week I didn't see her—she was ill in her cabin, like every one else almost; but the first time she came on deck she walked up to me and held out her hand and said, 'Forgive and forget, Adolphus: I was hasty and impetuous, and did not do justice to the disinterested way you concealed your agony: you were brusque—it was painful to me, but I should have respected the generous mask with which you covered your disappointment.' She was always harping away about my agony and disappointment, when, in fact, I was as jolly as a sandboy; but it didn't matter to me, and seemed to please her, so what was the odds? In a very few days we were on the old Malta footing again. She never let me out of her sight. All the other women were as ugly as sin, so all the men paid *her* no end of attention. She was a showy woman, mind you, and fellows are hard up for something to do at sea when they are not sleeping or eating. At first she rather took up with one or two of them. There was a tea-planter, and an Indian officer, and a doctor she carried on with for a bit; and then, hang it! I got on my mettle, and resolved to show these fellows they hadn't a chance. So I went in for her again in the old way, and made all the others wild, and I liked that. I got her to turn the doctor out of his seat at meals, which was next to mine, and give it up to her, and she sat beside me all the rest of the voyage.

Then I used to carry up my arm-chair to the deck for her when it was fine, and wouldn't let her use any other person's; and if there was a little sea on, I used to give her my arm up and down the deck. How the other women used to scowl and sneer and whisper! but I liked that too. Then she quarrelled with all the women, and quarrelled with the men, and made me quarrel with them, and had a row with the captain about her light at night, and set me at him. He was a good fellow the skipper, but I had a jolly row with him. While we were jawing about the light, he said, 'Who the deuce is this empress who is to have special indulgences on board the Fleece?' and I said, 'D—n the Fleece!' and that she was a very different lot from what the Fleece carried in general; and he said, 'He hoped so.' And I said, 'Why?' and he said he thought she was 'a queer one.' Then I told him to explain himself, and he said, 'Do you see any green in my eye, youngster?' and I said, 'D—n his eye, and not to call me youngster.' Then we had a tremendous turn-up; he swore he would report me to the adjutant-general, and I swore I'd have him up before the Board of Trade; then he roared out laughing and went away forward. But it was hot water for me after that, all the voyage; it was not pleasant, I can tell you. The only comfort I had was, that all the men were as jealous as tigers of me. As the voyage began to draw to an end she got awfully low and moping, and cried very much; and I asked her what the row was. Then she told me she had terrible misgivings about the marriage; that she feared she had mistaken her feelings, and



"Now the other women used to scowl & sneer & whisper: but I liked that too."

that her strength would fail her; that she sometimes felt it would be an injustice to the ‘person in the highest official position in the civil service’ to give him her hand when her heart could never be his. One night in the dusk we were sitting on deck together, and she was saying all this; and that, as for her own feelings, of course happiness was banished from her heart for ever, and that probably it would be better if its desolate beatings were stilled for evermore, and she laid at rest in an Orient grave, over which no one would drop a tear; and she cried awfully, and popped her head down on my shoulder. I was confoundedly cut up, and said, ‘Don’t cry, Carlotta; it’s sure to be all right. You’ll find the person in the highest official position will turn out a trump, and no mistake.’

“But she moaned and sobbed, and kept saying, ‘No, no, no; lay me in an Orient grave!’ At last I got cut up with a vengeance, and—and I kissed her—I did—I wanted to soothe her, I was so sorry for her, so I kissed her, and said, ‘Don’t cry, my darling, I can’t bear it.’ The moment I did this she jumped up with a scream, and cried, ‘I’m ruined! I’m undone! Look there! look there!’ I looked, but I could see nothing but the captain’s parrot taking his evening stroll on the quarter-deck. ‘What was it?’ I said. ‘Oh!’ said she, sitting down and panting, with both hands on her heart—‘oh! it’s all over now; my character’s gone: *that* Mrs Gligsby was looking out of the cabin door and saw us. Oh Adolphus, you’ve destroyed me! you wicked, wicked man!’ I swore I hadn’t seen Mrs Gligsby, and went into the

cabin to look after her, and there she was on the off side of the table, with her back to the wall, calmly playing whist with the captain and two others—so it couldn't have been her. But Carlotta wouldn't be comforted, and insisted that Mrs Gligsby had been there, and had harked back to the whist all as a blind, for that she was cunning and deceitful and vindictive, and I would see what I would see.

"At last we got to the 'Sandheads' and took our pilot on board, and our letters came down; and Carlotta made a tremendous shindy when there were none for her, and had hysterics all the way up the Hoogly: it was awful the way she went on.

"Well, we berthed opposite the Fort. No end of people came on board to receive their friends; and such a bustle and such a row!—nigger servants coming to look for masters, and hotel touts and custom-house officers, and all that sort of business. I went to my cabin to finish up my packing and be out of the scrimmage; and, after a bit, went up on deck to see about Carlotta's affairs, whom I had lost sight of in the bustle. By Jove, sir! there she was—sitting huddled up beside the wheel—pale as death, her eyes quite fixed, and with such a look of horror and despair, it seemed to freeze me. I went up to her and said, 'Good God! what's the matter?' and she said, quite calmly, but in a dreadful voice, 'Go away, and let me die!' and then I found that the person in the highest official position, &c., hadn't put in an appearance, and, by degrees, that she had no money—not a stiver; and she and her maid each had a long tic with the steward. Well, what could I do?

Of course I paid her bill and drove her to Spence's Hotel, and established her there with her woman, and told her not to be unhappy, for that I had lots of tin, and would be delighted to be her banker till the person in the highest, &c., turned up; and then I drove off to the Great Eastern myself.

"The next day I went over to see about her. Her maid came down and said, 'What was to be done?' her mistress had had some bad news that morning, and was nearly out of her mind—'What was she to do?' 'I didn't know,' I said, 'unless I could see her mistress—could I see her?' The maid didn't think she was calm enough then; I had better call back in an hour or so, and so I did. Carlotta was sitting in a great empty cheerless room; her eyes were red and her face white as death, and her hair all tumbled. She looked so wretched, so desolate, who could have helped pitying her? I did from my heart, as I thought, 'Poor thing! what lines for her! to be so far away from home—a woman—by herself—with friends or money—waiting to be married to a fellow who begins by allowing her to arrive in this devil of a country without a welcome!' 'Carlotta,' I said, 'what is the matter, my poor girl?' but she didn't speak. I asked her again, but she only moaned out, 'I wish I were dead! I wish to heaven I were dead! I am disgraced, dishonoured, betrayed!' I took her hand—it felt like a bit of lead. 'Tell me what has happened,' I said. She raised her head for a moment and pointed to a note that lay on the table. It looked as if she had been crumpling and biting and crying over it—and so she had, I don't doubt. 'Am

I to read it?' I asked; and she made a sign that I was. Here it is, Donald. I've kept it, you see, in—in hopes of—I don't know what," and he read it:—

" 'MADAM,—I came to Calcutta to meet you yesterday, but an accident made me late in reaching the steamer, and when I did reach it you were gone. I do not regret the accident now, as it has been the means of preventing me from taking a step which I should, no doubt, have lived to regret bitterly. Making inquiries on board the ship as to your movements, I was informed by a very sensible person, who gave her name as Gligsby, that you had hurriedly left the ship with a Hussar officer—a Lieutenant Burridge; and on my expressing surprise, she said that, in her opinion, you would have left sooner if there had been any land touched at; for that of all the "discreditable conduct," as she expressed it, your conduct with this officer was the most discreditable she had ever witnessed. "Billings and cooings," she said, "morn, noon, and night;" and, what was worse, "frequent kissings almost in public." That, under the circumstances, I should decline to fulfil my engagement will scarcely surprise you. I regret the trouble you have been put to in coming out; but Lieutenant Burridge will, no doubt, indemnify you for that; and I can only say that, if he has one spark of honour, one ray of finer feeling, one iota of humanity left, he will make to you the only reparation which, as a man and a soldier, he can do, by marrying you himself without a moment's delay.—I am yours, &c.,

T. W.

"*P.S.*—I should add that the captain of the ship fully corroborates the painful statement of Mrs Gligsby.

"When I read this there was a kind of mist came over my eyes, and all sorts of things flashed through my mind as quick as lightning. Did I want to marry Carlotta? No, certainly not. I didn't care for her, and I didn't want to marry at all then. I was young and rich, and had large prospects, and I had very soon learned the value of these things in the world. A marriage like this would be a flooring thing for all my after-life. I could never shake it off—never. Then I looked at her, so desolate, so ill used, so heartbroken, and, as I believed, so fond of me, and I said to myself, 'If I forsake this poor woman in her grief, when she has lost all her prospects through me, I am the most selfish scoundrel in the world, and would deserve to be drummed out; and I'll stick to her—so help me God! I will.' All this passed in a moment. Then I knelt down beside her, and put my arm round her waist, and said, 'Don't cry, darling,' but she cried all the more; and I said, 'Carlotta, will you let me comfort you? Will you let me take the place of this scoundrel' (meaning the person in the highest official position) 'who has betrayed you?' Then she looked up—so sad and wearied she looked—and said, 'No, Adolphus, I love you too fondly to wish you to sacrifice your life to mine. Because I am wretched, why should you be? I can't accept a husband without his love,—and yours, I know, I haven't got.' I thought this very noble and disinterested of her, and I cried out, 'But I

do love you, Carlotta—I swear I do' (and I believed it for five minutes), 'and if you'll take me, here I am. I'll do my best to make you happy, and be a good husband to you as long as I live.'

"Then she threw her arms round my neck, and said I had raised her from the dead—that she cared for nothing else, now I said that I loved her—that she was perfectly happy, only would I mind saying it again and again? I did so. I vowed and swore that I adored her, and I kissed her like—like—a good deal; and then we had tiffin. I went out after to make arrangements for the marriage, and then we rode in 'the Course.' I was in a sort of dream; I remember the band playing there—a sweet kind of air, and rather a sad one, and it seemed to say, 'You've cooked your goose, Dolly, my boy, and all your jolly days are over.' By George! the band was right.

"Three days after, we were married in the church in Fort William; you know the church, Donald? I didn't know a soul, no more did Carlotta; and as she couldn't ask 'the person in the, &c.,' to give her away, I boned the doctor whose seat she had taken on board the Fleece, and he gave her away.

"We had a little make-believe marriage *déjeûner* at the hotel after. Gad! how miserable I was! The doctor got screwed, and insisted on making speeches, I remember—though we were only three—proposed 'The Queen' and 'The Rest of the Royal Family,' 'The Army and Navy,' 'The Church,' &c. &c., and kept cheering away like fun, all by himself; and brought in a punkah-wallah, and told him to return

thanks for the Church, because he was ‘japanined,’ he said, like a parson ; and he kicked the beggar down-stairs because he wouldn’t do it—couldn’t, you know, of course—and dropped an ice-pail after him ; and the landlord came up, and we had a row. Oh ! it was horrible ! it’s all like a bad dream. I recollect trifling little things as if it was yesterday, and I remember thinking how unlike it all was to what a good man’s and a good woman’s marriage ought to be. But Carlotta was in high spirits, and we drove down in the evening to Barrackpore, and went to the hotel there for the honeymoon. The honeymoon didn’t last long —only three days. I had reported myself in Calcutta, of course, and in fact got leave, you know, to go away from the town for a week, leaving my address in case I was wanted. My regiment was up country, but I was to march up in charge of detachments or something, whenever there was anything to go. It was the Mutiny-time, and no fellow could travel up country like a gentleman then, I can tell you. Every one had to put his shoulder to the wheel. Well, we had been honeymooning at Barrackpore for three days—Lord, how sick I was of it!—when an orderly arrived with a thundering official for me.

“ I was to march up country with a mixed draft in forty-eight hours. I didn’t know what the deuce to do with Carlotta. You see I had made no preparations, because the marriage had come off so suddenly. But in we went to Calcutta, and put up at Spence’s ; and I thought I would go and consult the regimental agent, and I did. He looked gloomy at first, and said, patronisingly, he didn’t see what was to be done ;

leaving a lady at an hotel was an expensive business for a subaltern, and there were no lodgings in Calcutta. I said, ‘Lodgings be hanged! I must take a house for her, of course.’ He laughed, and said, ‘Who’s to pay the piper?’ and I flared up, and said, ‘Who *should* pay the piper for a man’s wife but a man himself?’ And he fumbled his keys and things in his pocket, and said, coolly, ‘You have private means, perhaps; but rent here is enormous: it would take more than your whole pay, for it isn’t even full batta down here.’ I said, ‘Yes, of course I have private means; I have four thousand a-year, and as much more as ever I like from my grandmother.’ Then his manner changed at once—I’ll be hanged if I ever met a fellow of that sort, Donald, whose manner didn’t change when he found I was coiny. Coin can do a lot of things, but it can’t make me happy now, confound it! Well, he became as civil as possible, and I gave him a letter from my bankers at home; and then he wanted me to tiffin, and come and live with him—and have a brandy-and-soda then and there, and a weed, all among his ledgers and things. He was very useful, and took any amount of trouble, and found a very nice house before next forenoon, in Garden Reach, all furnished and ready (in fact, I believe he turned out of it himself—the rent was so enormous); and you know you can get servants (of a sort) by whistling there; so that night Carlotta and I took up house in our new abode. I gave her an unlimited credit (like a fool) with the agent, and next day said ‘Good-bye.’ She cried, of course, tremendously. I can’t say I did; for, as soon

as we were married, her manner and style seemed to change, and I saw she was a horribly coarse, low-bred, vulgar woman, and that she had been acting the lady, just as if she were on the stage, all the time before. She could act like fun, she was amazingly clever. So I went away up country with my draft, and I thought as I left Calcutta, ‘I don’t care if I never come down country again.’”

CHAPTER X.

“And all
Her falser self slipped from her like a robe.”
—TENNYSON.

“From all such devils, good Lord, deliver us.”
—*Taming of the Shrew*.

BURRIDGE’S STORY CONTINUED.

“I needn’t bore you with the march up. At Benares they took us and sent us off with a ‘flying column,’ and we were dodging about after rebels for nine weeks; then we got to Allahabad, and off again on another cruise, and so on we were handed about from one place to another, and all through Central India. The detachment was separated and broken up by this time, for they boned men and officers just as they wanted them, and didn’t care what regiment you belonged to, and whether you were cavalry, infantry, or artillery—but you know

all that. I had very affectionate letters from Carlotta every now and then ; to read them you would have believed that she spent half her time in praying for me, and the other half in bullying the post-office authorities about not getting my letters regularly.

"It was a horrid campaign—nothing but marches and forced marches—pelting away after the mutineers in the heat of the sun, just as if we were in Northern Europe—night alarms and day alarms—short commons and long fasts—fever, ague, cholera, and sun-stroke,—that was about the programme. Deuced little fighting. Now and then we got a chance, and blazed at them at long range ; and sometimes, when they were two hundred to one, they would stand up to their guns—then there was a rush and a little bayoneting ; but it was all over in a minute or two, and they were off like the wind, and it had all to begin again—padnaggering away after the beggars, and all for no satisfaction. I was sick of it, and uncommon glad when we were ordered into quarters. Then I joined my new regiment. They were at Wallahbad, a small station near the hills. I had never seen them all this time, for they had been cruising in another direction. I liked them—they were a good set of fellows ; and when I joined I found I had just got my troop. Promotion was going fast then (the sun had something to say to that, and cholera a good deal) ; but as I was an infantry fellow, I had the drill and riding-school business to go through ; and that was a bore. Somehow I couldn't make up my mind to tell the fellows I was married, and I was so young no one would have dreamt of it.

I was desperately unwilling that Carlotta should come up, and always wanted her to put off and off. I told her I was kept so busy with the drill and riding-school it was no good her coming up yet a while, and that she had better stay where she was. So she did for a bit; but I suppose she got sick of it, for all of a sudden up she came without any warning. That put me in a nice fix, I can tell you. I remember her arrival so well. It was just after tiffin, and all the fellows were lounging about in the mess-compound, for it was coolish weather. The public road ran just past the compound; and all of a sudden some one sang out, 'Holloa! an arrival!—what's this?' and we looked, and there was a string of dâk gharries—four or five of them—covered with baggage and servants and things. This was a great excitement, and we all ran and looked over the wall; and the first gharrie—who do you think was in it? who but Kitty Coloony, my wife's drunken Irish maid! She was drunk then, and drinking out of a black bottle, and a monkey and a parrot were cruising about loose in the trap with her. When she passed us she waved her hand and holloaed out, 'The tap of the marnin' to ye, bhoys! Connemarra for iver!' and sank back into the gharrie, kicking her abominable heels up into the air. I remember a voice saying, 'It's the Queen of Sheba, and she's as drunk as an owl of the desert.' But my heart seemed to stand still, and I knew—but before I could think, up came the second gharrie, and there sure enough was Carlotta herself. She spotted me at once, halted the gharrie, jumped out like mad, and threw her arms round my neck over the compound wall,

singing out, ‘Darling Dolly ! my chee-ild ! my chee-ild ! my Adol-phus !’ just as if she was on the stage.

“All the fellows roared ; and I saw she was as drunk as Kitty Coloony. ‘Who is this woman, sir ?’ cried the Colonel to me (he was married, and a religious fellow) ; and I said, ‘It’s all right, sir ; I’ll put it all square.’ I hardly knew what I was saying or doing, but I jumped the compound wall, bundled Carlotta into the gharrie, and told the whole caravan to drive to my bungalow. As we moved off I could see all the fellows doubled up with laughing ; some of them kicking about in fits on the grass, and the Colonel marching into the mess-house with a face like a scourge. Well, there was a subaltern of mine, Fred Lascelles, shared the bungalow with me. When the procession arrived, Fred was sitting smoking in the verandah, and you should have seen his face. I had never told him about Carlotta, you know. He gave a view-holloa when he saw Kitty Coloony, and she jumped out and began to dance a jig ; and Fred, who was a lively bird, joined her, and there they were capering away on the grass when I came up. ‘What does it all mean, Dolly ?’ he cried, holding his sides ; and then he saw by my face there was something wrong ; and I said, ‘My wife’s in the second gharrie, Fred, and I want you to turn out for her, like a good fellow.’ ‘Your wife !’ he said, with a queer twinkle in his eye. ‘Walker ! all right though, Dolly. I’ll turn out in a jiffy.’ ‘Upon my honour, Fred, she’s my married wife,’ I said ; and he went away in to order his servants to move his traps, muttering something about ‘having cut his eye-teeth.’

"I got Carlotta quieted down, and to bed, and her baggage and niggers and monkeys and parrots and Kitty Coloony stowed away ; and I was just sitting down to smoke a weed, and think over my troubles, when up came an orderly and told me that the Colonel wished to see me immediately. Off I went to the orderly room—pretty savage I was too—and there was the Colonel looking like thunder. 'What am I to understand, Captain Burridge,' he said, 'by the disgraceful scene we have just witnessed?' 'It wasn't my fault, sir,' I replied. 'How dare you bring that disreputable woman into my station, sir?' (He was commanding the station too, you know.) 'She's my wife, sir ; I suppose I have a right to bring her anywhere ; and as to "disreputable," how dare *you* use that word?' 'She was drunk, sir,' said the Colonel, quailing a little though. 'She was not drunk—no man shall say she was ; she was overcome by the heat. Is this all you have to say to me, Colonel Winthrop?' 'I beg your pardon, Captain Burridge, if she is really your wife.' 'She is really my wife, sir, upon my honour!' I replied. 'Then I beg your pardon, Captain Burridge.' But he spoke very coldly, and I knew he didn't believe she was my wife a bit. However, I could only say good-morning, and come away.

"The life I led there after this was dreadful. Carlotta had thrown off her mask altogether : her temper was awful—her language was abominable—and she constantly got drunk and insulted people. She wanted to call on all the ladies in the station, but I swore, if she did, that I would sell out and go to

the backwoods of America, so she gave it up; but at the band she used to make remarks on the people in a loud voice, and stare impudently at the ladies and laugh in their faces, and turn round and sometimes call out things after them, so that I forbade her to go to the band. I couldn't prevent it sometimes though; and at last, one evening when I was on guard, she took the opportunity of going there by herself. The collector of the district was there in his buggy—a fat old codger, awfully bumptious; and Carlotta, who was furiously drunk, rode up and asked him what the devil he meant by driving a white horse. He said he supposed he might drive what kind of horses he pleased; and she said, 'No,' that that was his mistake, and that if she ever caught him there with anything but piebalds again, she would leather him within an inch of his life. Then the old fellow got in a rage and said, 'Leather away!' and she did—cut his face open with her whip, and broke his hat with the butt-end, and galloped off. You can imagine the row. The Colonel sent for me and said, 'Captain Burridge, I won't discuss with you whether the person under your protection is your wife or not. One thing is now certain, that she is disreputable and a public annoyance, and, being so, she shall not remain in my station. She must be out of it in twenty-four hours.' I could only say, 'I'm ashamed to repeat that she is my wife, but of course I quite see that she must go, and go she shall.'

"The next morning I had it out with her,—and such a shindy! She vowed she wouldn't move, but I told her the Colonel would either have her locked



"He said "leather away" & she did."

up or removed by force ; so off she went, away down country, with Kitty Coloony and all the other beasts, back to Calcutta, to the house in Garden Reach, which I had kept on all the time. I didn't go with her, but I couldn't remain in the station—I was too ashamed ; so I got leave and went away to the hills for a cruise by myself, waiting till I could get an exchange. It was coming down again that I met your brother at Nynee Tal, and he took me for you, and that was the first I ever heard of you, Donald. At Nynee Tal I got a letter from the Calcutta agent, saying that my wife was spending a lot of money—too much, he thought—and had come and asked for £1000 in a lump. He had declined to give it to her without consulting me ; and was he to give it to her ? I wrote back to say No, not in a lump, but that he might pay for her any bills she wanted paid, but not to give her more than £100 at a time. I didn't know what tricks she might be up to. I remained at Nynee Tal and Simla for a bit, and then I got another letter from the agent (none from Carlotta all this time) saying that she had come again for the £1000, and that when he told her my decision she was very abusive ; and that her brother, who was with her and intoxicated, had also abused and struck him ; and that therefore he had felt compelled to transfer the agency in the mean time to other hands, as he could not have transactions with such a person ; and, on the whole, he thought I had better come down without delay. Down I went post-haste. I had never heard of her brother before, and I was naturally inquisitive about him, you see. I sent no warning to Car-

lotta, and arrived in Garden Reach one morning about seven o'clock.

"The sitting-rooms were to the back of the house, and I got in without her hearing, and walked straight into a morning-room that opened on to a veranda and garden. There I saw a sight that astonished me. Carlotta was there in a dressing-gown, with her hair down, with bloodshot eyes and a white sodden face—so old and haggard and blackguard-looking, just like the horrid figures you see prowling out and in the gin-palaces in London ; and opposite her—who do you think was sitting opposite her? with nothing but a flannel shirt and peijamas on—a short pipe in his mouth—unshaven—dirty—drunk—who? who but Count Arnold Doldorouski. I stopped at the door stupefied. Carlotta, who had a large tumbler of liquor in her hand, threw it down and jumped up with a scream when she saw me. She could still act though, and well, and she recovered herself in an instant, and rushed towards me to embrace me. I couldn't stand that, and pushed her away. Then she cried out, 'What! not one fond embrace in the moment of my joy! The Count has just arrived with the happy, happy tidings; my father is delivered from the mine, and resumes his name and place in society! Rejoice with me, my Adolphus! rejoice! rejoice!' and she threw her eyes up and clasped her hands. All this time the Count had never risen, but sat blinking at me through his tobacco-smoke. When she had done he croaked out, 'Stow that gammon; it's a cock that won't fight. I'm sick of it, and I'm going to split; I am, by gum!' Carlotta looked

flabbergasted for a moment, and then said to me, ‘The fatigue of travel, the excitement, the heat, have unhinged his poor mind; I must rally him.’ Then, turning to the ruffian (and I saw her wink at him), she said, in her theatrical way, ‘How, my lord! your lordship strangely forgets yourself! Seek a little repose now, and you will recount the happy tidings afterwards. He has come,’ she explained to me, ‘through the wilds of Russia and in by the north of India, riding night and day to relieve my mind—was it not good and key-ind and noble? Go, my lord, and repose a while.’ His lordship, however, declined to go, and again repeated that he was sick of the gammon, and would split; and then he started up and began to sing a bit of that extravaganza song, ‘I’m not the Queen, ha, ha! I’m not the Queen, ha, ha!’ and added, ‘No; nor the Lord Mayor, nor the Archbishop of Canterbury, nor Count Bubblefrowsky, nor any lord. I’m Bill Whytock, I am; and I’ll fight you for a pint and lick you for a quart, you d—d swaggering, officering noodle!’ and then he took a long pull at his brandy-and-soda, and sat down.

“Carlotta saw the game wouldn’t do and changed it at once, and said, ‘Adolphus, forgive me; I have deceived you, but it was from a kind motive. This is my brother William. Distress and poverty, from my father’s long confinement, have brought him to what you see him. He had no asylum, no home, and he came to me. Forgive me. Can a sister turn her back upon a brother? Never.’ ‘She’d better not,’ said the Count; ‘but this is more like sense; so, Dolly, I look towards you, and I’ll be your

brother, if you like. Here's your health, you jolly green ;' and he took another pull at his liquor, and reeled out of the room, remarking that he 'would go and have a little mirth with the parrots.' Then I had it out with Carlotta. She said her brother had been in want and distress, and had come out in desperation to look for her, without her sending for him. She feared he had got into wild drinking ways, but might be reclaimed if I would pay his passage home, and give him a couple of hundred pounds to start him in business. I said I would, provided he went off at once by that day's mail, and I never saw him again ; and she (she was tremendously agitated, but as meek as a lamb) went into another room and discussed the matter with the Count, and after a long wrangle she came back and said he was deeply grateful, and would go at once ; and he did go. I made the agent pay his passage and see him on board, and I never set eyes on the ruffian again. A nice little domestic incident, wasn't it ? My health was a good deal smashed with all the worry and distress I had gone through—and I had a doctor in, who said I must positively go to sea for a month. Accordingly I took a passage in a steamer going to Rangoon, and sailed two days after. Something went wrong with the screw or the boilers, and we had to put back, and I was in Calcutta again in a week. I went to the house in Garden Reach ; my wife wasn't in : she was riding on the Course, the servants said. I went to my room to change my dress, and requiring a pair of scissors, looked for them in a work-box of my wife's in the adjoining room, and there, lying open in

the box, was a note beginning ‘ Angelic Being ! ’ This was interesting, so I went on, and found it was from a fellow saying how he loved her, and asking why, loving him as she confessed she did, she would not consent to be his, and fly from that imbecile husband of hers, union with whom was a disgrace to a woman of her soul. He said his fond heart would not allow him to believe that her decision was final, and that he would come that night at seven o’clock to hear if she would not relent. It was signed ‘ Aaron Lewis,’ and I saw by the date that the promised visit was to take place that very evening, and indeed in half an hour. So I assembled the servants, and told them that if they told their mistress I had come home, I would flay them all alive—not only the fellows who told, but the entire household. Then I locked myself into an anteroom that opened on to the drawing-room, and waited.

“ Presently in came my lady and ordered tea; as soon as she was settled I got a chink of the door open to see all that went on, and before long Mr Aaron Lewis was announced. You never saw such a thief to look at, Donald. He was a short, stout, thick-set fellow, with a neck like a bull, a head of hair like a black haystack, a nose like a pump - handle, and a nigger’s blubber lips. He was evidently a Jew, and a very bad dirty sort of Jew. When he came in he kissed his hand three times, skipped across the room, and went down with a bang on his knees before Carlotta. She gave him her hand like a stage empress, and he kissed it and said; ‘ Relent! relent! and fly with me to love and joy.’ Then she put up her hand-

kerchief to her eyes with one hand, and with the other stroked his filthy hair, and warbled out, ‘Tempt me not, my Aaron—tempt me not; be satisfied that my heart is thine, and wait! wait!’ I suppose she thought I was seedy and going off the hooks, and she was hedging with this beast, and meant, wait till I was dead. ‘If it is worldly prudence,’ said the Jew, who was a deuced poetical kind of Jew—‘if it is worldly prudence which stifles the emotions of that fond heart, dismiss it. I have wealth—I have gold—I have riches; I shower them at your feet!’ and he butted his great bullet-head forward in his ecstasy and upset the teapot all over the place, and I swear I could hardly help laughing.

“Then they set to work and abused me. Lord! how they did pitch into me, and my follies and weaknesses. I can tell you, Donald, this woman I had married out of pity had no pity upon me. At last the Jew said, in a tragical voice, ‘If he was here, if I saw him, I could not contain myself, I would r-r-r-rend him from limb to limb,’ and he rolled his eyes and gnashed his teeth like an ogre. ‘Would you?’ said I, stepping out. ‘Well, here I am—rend away!’ Wasn’t the Jew taken aback! You should have seen his face. Then I took him by the scruff of the neck and kicked him up and down the room, and then I got a cutting whip and let into him till he bellowed like a mad bull, and I took the butt and crashed into his head and face with it, and bundled him to the window when I was tired and tilted him out into the garden. Carlotta had fainted really, I believe; but she came to quick enough. I hadn’t

much to say to her, and I said it in a few words. She began her theatricals, but I said, ‘Stop ; I may be a noodle and an imbecile and a disgrace to be married to, but I’m not noodle enough to have anything more to do with you. This house will be shut up the day after to-morrow, you can make your own arrangements in the mean time. To-morrow send a lawyer to meet mine at the agent’s at twelve o’clock. They will draw up a deed of separation ; I wish to heaven it was a divorce, but you’re too cunning for that. I shall settle £500 a-year on you. I am going to Europe next week, if you should happen to be going that way and we meet, be good enough to remember we’re total strangers ; but I sincerely hope I may never see your face again.’ Then I got my traps together and went to the hotel. My wife had run up awful tics in Calcutta, and paying them off really dipped me, and I had to draw on my grandmother for an extra grant. She was a little astonished at my expenses, and I had to tell her a cock-and-bull story about the fearful mortality among my elephants —as if I kept a herd of a few hundreds all to myself. The good old soul paid up at once. I believe she imagines ever since that cavalry regiments are mounted on elephants in India ; but that was better than that she should know all the shame and distress I went through, which would break her heart, I believe.

“ After a year at the depot, I went out to India again to the headquarters of my present regiment, and I spent three wretched years there, on the Madras side this time, principally at Bangalore. I have never seen Carlotta ; all I know is that her money is paid

by my agents to some solicitors in London for her every half-year.

"We came home about eighteen months ago, and that brings me down to my acquaintance with Mary."

"Well, Adolphus," I said, "I must say you have had uncommonly hard lines. One would almost say that *one* moral of your story at least is, 'Never act upon the impulse of kind feelings ;' but if you don't mind telling me, I should like to know what happened the day after—I mean the day you awoke and remembered your declaration to Miss Richmond."

"The next day I did not see her at all—it was impossible, for some reason or other. I lay in bed all the forenoon, in a very unhappy state, you may believe. At one time I thought of this millstone round my neck—this abominable woman, but for whom I might be the happiest fellow in the world ; and then I thought of what I had said to Mary, and how on earth it was all to be unsaid ; and then I kept saying to myself, ' You scoundrel, you villain, you blackguard, you've been and gone and done it, and you'll end in the hulks, which is just the place for you.' And then a thought came into my head, ' Was there no means of dissolving this marriage anyhow ? ' I had thought of this before a score of times, but had dismissed the idea always, because I knew anything I did would require to be public, and I couldn't bear the thought of everybody knowing what an ass I had been ; and, above all things, I wouldn't have my old grandmother know about the business. But now I had a reason—a very tremendous reason, you see—and I felt that I didn't care about the publicity ; and as for my grand-

mother, she would get over it, provided only I could get rid of Carlotta for ever, and be able to go to Mary as an honest man. I thought away as hard as I could, but I haven't got many brains, you know, and it all came to nothing, of course. Tommy Carleton's brother, an Oxford fellow, was staying with us at the time. No end of a fellow to talk and lay down the law about everything. I'll be hanged if he didn't seem to know everything, and somehow, even when you agreed with him, he contrived to show you that you knew nothing and were wrong. At mess that night my mind was still running on the thought, 'Can I ever get rid of this woman by any sort of dodge or contrivance of the law?' and it seemed to me that if anybody could give one a wrinkle on the subject, this devil of a brother of Tommy Carleton's, who knew everything, ought to be able. I must tell you that my regiment knew nothing about my marriage, only that there had been a queer story about a woman in India—ages ago. Well, I wanted to draw the Oxford man, and I was very cunning about it. I told him a story—my own story, or very like it—about a friend of mine—John Smith, I called him—being married to a woman—Susan Jones—when he was quite a lad, and didn't care for her, and about her being a drunken old scoundrel, and his wanting to get rid of her, and that he (J. S.) had written to me for my opinion (as a practical man) whether, if he became a Roman Catholic, the Pope could smash up his marriage by a bull or something,—this idea *had* occurred to me, and I thought it happy. The Oxford man laughed very long and very loud, and

said, ‘Poor dear John Smith ! his innocence is almost as singular as his name,’ and did I mean to say that I was ignoramus enough to entertain such an idea ? Of course I said ‘No,’ and that I only mentioned it as a capital joke ; adding that I supposed J. S. was regularly cooked and dished, and could never get out of it. Then Tommy Carleton’s brother looked awfully wise, and asked some questions.

“‘What age was *this* Smith at the time of marriage?’ I said, ‘Nineteen, or thereby.’ ‘Where did the marriage take place?’ and I said, ‘Otaheite, one of the South Sea Islands’—why, I don’t know. The Oxford man laughed at this, and asked if John Smith was a missionary ; and I said, ‘No, that he was only cruising about for a lark.’ Then he asked if he had ever gone through a second ceremony. I said, ‘No, he hadn’t seen the woman for years.’ Then Tommy Carleton’s brother folded himself back in his chair (I can see him now) and said, ‘Tell your friend, tell *this* Smith that he is no more married than I am.’ ‘How?’ I cried—I couldn’t keep down my excitement. ‘How !’ said the Oxford man ; ‘why, take my word for it, I haven’t eaten dinners at an inn for four terms for nothing. It’s beyond the jurisdiction of Doctors’ Commons—he was a minor—*cadant vincula*. Smith is a free bachelor, and Jones a free spinster. All he’s got to do is to file a bill, you know. Presto ! the thing’s done. What a goose the fellow must have been not to come to me—I mean, to some lawyer—before, if he wanted to be quit of *this* Jones ! He ought to give me a fee.’ ‘So he will,’ I cried, wild with joy and gratitude—‘so he will, the biggest you

ever got—name your figure.' And all the fellows laughed; they thought I was chaffing the Oxford man.

"I asked Tommy after dinner if his brother was a certainty, and Tommy said there was no mistake about *him*; that he was the cleverest fellow they had ever raised at Oxford, and that he couldn't take his degree at present for the simple reason that no examiner there had the pluck to tackle him, but that the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge was reading up, and hoped to be ready to have a round with him next term. Then as to law, though he had only eaten dinners for four terms at his inn (I'll be hanged if I could see what staying at an hotel had to do with it), the benchers were already afraid of him, and it was supposed he would be let 'through' without any more eating. I then asked Tommy's brother what 'Smith' should do. 'Put the case with the facts into his solicitor's hands in town; he'll file the bill, and it will all be settled in a fortnight,' he said. I would have liked to give Tommy's brother a service of gold plate on the spot. At last, then, I was going to be free from my bondage, and Mary and I might be married as soon as ever 'the bill was filed.' I never could tell you, I needn't try to tell you, all I felt.

"By the by, you know the locket with A E I on it?—she was wearing it, you said, the other night. Well, that night I telegraphed to Emmanuel for the chastest ornament he had, and that locket came back by return of post. I met Mary the next night at a dance, and carried her off at once to a quiet corner to make my confession. I believe I was rather wild in my talk at first, and I remember she looked startled

and surprised. I said, ‘I love you, Mary, more than everything in the world, but I was a villain to tell you so.’ ‘How?’ said Mary, with her eyes very wide. ‘I’ll tell you,’ I said; ‘I was a villain the night before last when I told you that I loved you, and now I tell you I love you, and I’m not a villain; can you guess what I mean?’ She said, ‘No;’ and it wasn’t likely she should, was it? ‘I thought I was married already, Mary;’ I went on, ‘when I first spoke to you’ (Mary gave a gasp and turned deadly pale); ‘but I needn’t say *thought*, for I thought of nothing but you, and how I loved you, at the time. I *had* considered myself a married man—miserably married to a bad woman, whom I hadn’t seen for years, and I was led away by my feelings to tell you of my love, which I had no right to do; and I would have been back to-day to confess, and go down on my knees for your forgiveness, but now everything is changed. I’m glad I was a villain, because I’m not a villain; and though I was married yesterday morning, I may say I’m a bachelor now, and she’s a spinster, for the bill will be filed and the whole thing settled in a fortnight.’ Poor Mary couldn’t follow me a bit, and seemed frightened and anxious to get away; but I implored her to sit down and I would be calm, and I told her the whole of my story from the beginning—this miserable story I’ve been telling you.’ She was terribly cut up, and cried, and was sorry for me, and didn’t blame me a bit, and said she hoped the bill would be filed all right, but that if it wasn’t she would never reproach me, but remain single all her life for my sake, and love me all the same, and never look

at another fellow. And then I saw she was an angel, not only because of her beautiful eyes and golden hair, but because her heart was so good and kind and tender and true, as the angels are, don't you know ?

"I didn't like to write to the family solicitor—indeed I didn't wish to write to any one, but to state my case by word of mouth. So I got the address of a legal firm in good practice, and a week after went up to see them. In the mean time I saw Mary every day, and had such a happy week. We both made up our minds that the bill would be filed without the slightest delay, and talked of our marriage and our plans as if everything was settled. One thing we didn't do, fortunately—we didn't give out our engagement. I believe the first night I spoke to Mary she told her cousin, from whom she had no secrets, that I had proposed and that she had accepted me. That cousin was this very Lady Rose O'Shea now at F—. She was at the ball, of course, but I can't remember her—indeed what could I remember of that night except one person and one thing ? But when Mary found out about the previous marriage, she would tell no one, and wouldn't hear of her father being spoken to, and even refused to answer her cousin's questions about the affair. As she said, 'It would never do till the bill was filed.'

"Of course people suspected and talked, but that didn't matter ; no one interfered with us, and we met every day. I could hardly persuade myself to go away to town on the business—it was so delightful down there—it was about the only real happiness I ever had ; but at last Mary urged me to it, saying it

was only a little temporary separation, a little momentary grief, to bring about our complete happiness—and at last I went. I saw the lawyer as soon as I arrived in town. He pricked up his ears when I told him it was a matrimonial case; and when I told him I had plenty of money, and didn't care what I spent on the matter, provided it was done quickly and effectually, he became quite affectionate. Then I stated the whole case to him. When I had finished, he stroked his chin and said, ‘It appears to me that you have no actual evidence in support of a divorce after all.’ ‘I don't want a divorce,’ I said—‘I don't require one; I'm going to annul the marriage altogether.’ ‘As how?’ he asked. ‘Why,’ I said, ‘I'm going to file a bill, of course; the thing's as plain as a pike-staff.’ He was rather a grave man, but he laughed and coughed a good deal; and when I asked him how much the bill would stand me in, he laughed and coughed more, and begged my pardon. Then I had to tell him about Tommy Carleton's brother and his opinion, whereupon he said that Mr Carleton was evidently an impudent pretender or a practical joker. ‘It was impossible to prove the marriage void—that was a certainty,’ he said; ‘but, judging from the style of the woman, it might probably be easy to obtain evidence that would render a dissolution practicable. Where was the woman now?’ I told him I didn't know. She was in India the last time I heard of her, but my agents in the country remitted £250 half-yearly to a London firm on her account, and her whereabouts was therefore discoverable. The lawyer said I had strangely neglected my

interests. In the first place, she might be dead, and some dishonest relative might be personating her, and drawing her annuity ; in the second place, if I wanted to get rid of her, it was clearly expedient that a surveillance should be established to note the manner or life she was leading. If I would give him the address of her agent in London, he would get things in train ; and if the woman was still in India, he would set a sharp correspondent on her track—a man who would ferret out anything ; while, if she were in Europe, he would easily put her under a vigilant observation. All steps of the sort were taken : it transpired that she had been leading a roving restless life—at first in India, then at different places in Europe—sometimes taking a theatrical engagement ; that she was still given to excessive drinking and to gambling ; but she baffled all efforts to obtain the kind of evidence required for my release. There the matter stands at present. The verdict of the lawyer was a terrible blow to Mary, as it was to me. I wrote and told her about it—how the bill could never be filed ; but added that there was no reason to despair, as the lawyers were hard at work, had got an idea, and were sanguine that eventually something could be done to release me ; at the same time, she must consider herself free from any kind of engagement, more particularly as it appeared to me that we could neither meet nor correspond under existing circumstances. She wrote me back such a jolly letter, saying that, whatever happened, she would always love me the same, and never marry any other fellow, though of course she agreed with me that we could neither correspond nor meet

unless some favourable change in circumstances took place, for which she would always pray.

"I've never seen her or heard from her since ; and though I know she's as true and constant as a rock, still, Donald, a fellow has his low fits when everything looks black ; and for some time past I've been tremendously down on my luck—all from never hearing anything the least cheering, and having no communication with her ; so that at last I began to persuade myself she had forgotten me altogether ; and it was only when I heard she was wearing my locket that I felt, 'Perhaps it isn't all over with me yet !' There, Donald, that's my yarn—the confession of Adolphus Burridge. I imagine you're a sharp fellow. They say Scotchmen are clear-headed. Perhaps you may hit on a scheme. So keep thinking it over, like a good fellow, will you ?"

I duly promised ; and as the day was now getting on, we remounted and rode back to camp, Burridge much relieved by his confession, and I deeply meditating on the strange tale I had heard.

CHAPTER XI.

"We vow to weep seas, live in fire, eat rocks, tame tigers ; thinking it harder for our mistress to devise imposition enough, than for us to undergo any difficulty imposed."—*Troilus and Cressida*.

For some time past, as I have said, my visits to the Hermitage had been almost daily ; certainly two days never elapsed without seeing me on my way to the shrine of my worship.

A common taste and a common interest are grand allies of the tender passion—indeed, without one or other, it is difficult to see how affairs of the heart can progress; and when such tastes and interests are sincerely attached to objects which, like the fine arts, appeal principally to the imagination and the heart, the force of the alliance can scarcely be overestimated.

Identity of feeling in such matters is something more than a coincidence of convictions in other things—it is a genuine sympathy, begetting and disclosing other sympathies. Thus hearts that are tending towards each other have, with that common assistance, such safe and tentative methods of mutual approach, that an almost perfectly unconscious harmony may be established between them, and their relations may be said to be definitively settled before the thought of either has found vent in speech—speech that comes, at last, sudden, ungainly, and incoherent, like the startled exclamations of those who encounter in the dark.

Lady Rose and I had at least one taste in common—a taste that was more than a taste, amounting, in my case at least, to a passion—and that was music; music, than which there is no more subtle minister of love, supplying to the lover an endless store of allegory and parable, wherein to wrap, as in a light and only half-concealing drapery, the supplicating form of his passion. I was unconscious of the part music was playing in the history of mine, unconscious that it was revealing her to me and interpreting me to her—conscious only that it yielded an increased delight, and was blended by a thousand associations

with the idea of my divinity. Yet not the less was it lending to the Parcae golden threads to weave the woof of our destiny withal.

But music was not the means of a merely inward, invisible, metaphysical *rappoart* between us; it was also the basis, the ostensible ground, of much of our outward and visible communion.

I admired a song of hers perhaps. Probably it would suit a tenor; probably it would suit me. She would copy it for me; she would teach it to me. I was not a quick pupil, and the song would require many rehearsals. Then came duets. At first she did not encourage the idea of performances in common; but as it became an object of constant solicitation and feverish desire on my part, she assented; and these were supreme moments for me, when my voice was mingled with hers in interpreting those inner mysteries of pathos which no human words—which music only—can rehearse.

But what were Lady Rose's feelings all this time? Ah! there was the question. But here again my want of culture in the art of love left me at fault; and as I began to speculate, after a time, what might come of this overmastering passion of mine, I could only wander about in a maze of conjectures, at the guidance of random hopes and fears. Lady Rose was kind to me—she was gracious to me; glad to see me when I came—and when I stayed away, noticed it with surprise, and, I even thought, with regret. She liked my songs—she sang my favourites of her own accord; and if I ventured to admire a particular dress or ornament, or to praise this or that colour, I rather

fancied that they did not from that circumstance lose in her regard. So, too, in the matter of flowers and books and many other subjects. But with all this, through all, even her deeper feelings, there seemed to run a vein of light irony and playful banter which would suddenly divert her from subjects of high interest. Malapropos (as it seemed to me) perceptions of the incongruous and the ludicrous were for ever interrupting the course of conversations that were becoming critical ; and I was often driven to the despairing conviction either that, with all her charming endowments, no grave impression could resist this spirit of mockery, or that *I* was being experimented upon, played with and tortured to gratify partly her womanly vanity, partly the quaint and humorous vein in which she chose to regard things in general. But then a man "in love" is undeniably a ludicrous object (*kismet*—it is written in his forehead). He is generally conscious of it himself, I should think, and may even be to himself at times the subject of a grimly humorous contemplation. Was it possible that Lady Rose was ignorant of my condition ? No ; it was impossible ; and was she, though accepting the adoration, likely to miss the absurdities that cling fatally to all such devotees ? Certainly not. She might love me then, although my incongruities as a lover might amuse her ? Perhaps. Well, that was to say that she might love and laugh at me at one and the same time, which was absurd. Love is devotion ; in laughter of this sort there is contempt—and who ever heard of a contemptuous devotion ? With these and suchlike speculations I began to tor-

ment myself unceasingly, the only conclusion I ever arrived at being that I was more and more hopelessly in love, and that without Rose life would be insupportable.

A short time before Burridge's confession, it had transpired at the Hermitage that his regiment had arrived at the camp. He was forthwith invited to dinner, but declined on the score of health.

I was cross-examined by Badger in open court about him, and as to whether I had made his acquaintance. I admitted that I had, that I knew him, that I was even intimate with him; finally, that I liked him, and thought him a good fellow. After this Miss Richmond was much more visible to me than she had been before, and much more inclined to be intimate and friendly. Lady Rose, on the contrary, seemed every now and then to remind herself that she had an occasion against me, and whenever Burridge became the subject of conversation, would treat me for some time with marked coldness. There was no mystery for once about this—indeed there was no mystery to me at all now. She looked on Burridge as a heartless scoundrel, and resented the idea of his being treated as an intimate and a good fellow, by any one whom she honoured with her acquaintance.

The day after Burridge had confided to me his story, I was detained in camp by duty, and it was not till the following afternoon that I was able to visit the Hermitage. Nearly three days without seeing Rose—an unparalleled event! I had found growing about the trees under which Burridge and I had

rested a pretty fern, of a species which Lady Rose (who was a connoisseur and collector) did not possess. I brought it home with me, and took it over this afternoon to present.

I found her alone in the garden. "Where have you been, Sir Truant?" she said. "All my pains and all my good temper have been wasted on you, for in three days you must have forgotten that passage in the new song about which you really were stupidity personified."

"Affairs of state and cares of office, Lady Rose," I said, "and the urgent call of friendship, have made me a very unwilling truant; but look! I have brought a peace-offering; here is an olive-branch in the shape of a new fern. I have not neglected my botany, at all events, you see."

"Oh! it is beautiful," she cried; "I am so much obliged. I had no idea this fern was to be found in this part of the country. Where did you find it?"

"I know a bank whereon this wild fern grows,
Close to the highroad which to Tongham goes,
Quite over-canopied with oak-trees fine;
I lay from luncheon till the hour to dine—
All Tuesday lay there, and on leaving brought
This tribute to an ever-present thought!"

I delivered this as if I had improvised it, although in fact it had been excogitated with some trouble on the ride from camp.

"Dear me!" cried Lady Rose, "you must certainly have been visited by some of the Muses when you were asleep, like—like who was it? But were you alone and asleep really and truly like a boy staying

away from school out of pure idleness? For shame! I didn't expect it of you!"

"No, Lady Rose, I wasn't staying away out of idleness—I stayed away to my regret, I assure you—much to my discontent. I spent a wretched day, and my feelings all yesterday were not enviable, that you may——"

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, "I hope you hadn't been killing any one, and burying him under the trees. Stay, let me see; is this really a fern and not a mandrake? No, no" (as I was going to interrupt her), "don't tell me about it. I might be taken up as an accomplice, you know."

"I was neither asleep, nor alone, nor killing any one, nor helping any one to kill and bury any one else; yet I had an interesting day, though, as I say, I regretted not being here."

"No tragedy after all! you were surveying, or skirmishing, or some stupid thing of that sort, I suppose?"

"Nothing of the sort; I was having a long *tête-à-tête* with a friend."

"And he bored you?"

"No; he didn't bore me at all; he interested me deeply."

"I should like to see him, as a natural curiosity. A person who can carry on a *tête-à-tête* interview from luncheon to dinner without becoming a bore, is a person I should like to see."

"I rather think you would not care to see the person in question."

"Why! who was he?"

"He was no other than the person to whom I am eternally indebted for having been, though involuntarily, the cause of my acquaintance with you."

"You mean—you mean——?"

"I mean Captain Burridge."

"Oh!" said Lady Rose; but there was a world of meaning concentrated in the monosyllable; by it Burridge was scourged and executed, and I was sent to Coventry.

"You are prejudiced against him, Lady Rose, I am well aware."

"No, Captain Bruce, *prejudice* is not the word. I have formed a *judgment* in the matter, and it is against him certainly."

"But I don't see—pardon me for saying so—how a judgment can be arrived at without hearing both sides."

"I don't pretend to be a lawyer, but I believe there is such a thing as judgment going by default; and it strikes me that this is clearly a case where it may do so justly."

"No, Lady Rose, I assure you it is not so. As a man, my friend is honourable and upright—and as a lover, constant and true as steel; but he has been the victim of cruel misfortunes and vile machinations. You yourself would be the first to do him justice if you knew his story."

"What is his story?"

"Pardon me, that is not his secret alone; it is Miss Richmond's."

"Do you mean to tell me that my cousin is satisfied this Captain Burridge is the paragon you repre-

sent him to be ; that she does not consider herself aggrieved, outraged, insulted, by his neglect ? ”

“ It is so indeed.”

“ I cannot comprehend this. You assert that there is a mutual understanding and an affection still subsisting between them ? ”

“ I do.”

“ Then why this misery, this separation, this intolerable mystery ? ”

“ Pardon me, Lady Rose ; *that* is the secret. That there is a barrier I do not of course deny. I will take it upon me, however, to say that I am quite sure your cousin would be much benefited by taking you into her confidence. You might tell her you are led to understand that Captain Burridge is not to blame, as you had believed, but that a secret reason justifies the cessation of his correspondence, and then advise her to relieve her distress by confiding the mystery to you.”

“ Is this barrier of a sort that might be removed by the counsels and good offices of friends ? ”

“ There is no reconciliation necessary ; they are at one. It is a question of great delicacy. I think it possible that the assistance of friends *might* be of use. I can assure you that no exertions on my part shall be spared to assist in clearing away their difficulties.”

“ Oh ! Captain Bruce, if you did that—if you made my cousin happy again—I don’t know how I could ever show my gratitude to you sufficiently. I am sure you are wise and prudent and clever, and if you only take it in hand you will succeed ; and you will take it in hand, will you not ? ”

"I am sorry that it is not a more distasteful undertaking."

"Why?"

"That I might show you, Lady Rose—that I might show you that your slightest wish is a law to me—that whatever it directed, however arduous and painful, it would become my deepest delight to execute; and" (I added, entirely forgetting, in my enthusiasm, the nature of the service that could alone help the lovers) "I will do anything—I will go through fire and water, to serve you—I mean them."

"Thank you; you are kind, but I retract what I said about your wisdom; I think you are an excessively foolish and hare-brained person, and I must give you another geranium if you do not try to improve."

Here was the east wind set in at once.

"Oh, if I could but receive *another* flower!" I sighed, in a rather lackadaisical manner I fear.

"Another flower? and so you shall. I will make interest with my uncle, and tease him to give you another of his sacred peonies."

"When a knight-errant went forth to perform a deed of arms at the request of his lady, did she not use to fortify him with some token, some badge of her, to animate him in the contest?"

"*Après?*"

"Well, then—that is—yes—I mean—give me your badge, your token, that I may wear it; give me a rose."

"Knights-errant wore their badges in their helmets, did they not? Now, I am sure a peony would look

much better in your shako ; how the General would admire it ! Just reflect ! ”

“ Ah ! Lady Rose, will you never be serious ? You are too cruel. The rose would be a priceless boon to me.”

“ Sir knight, I incline to think you are cunning, as it becomes a Celt to be ; but I too am cunning. You shall earn this flower. If I gave it you now you would, according to your own statement, have got all you wanted—you would have no inducement to persevere ; therefore you shall earn it. Come back safe and victorious out of the fire and out of the water, and you shall have it.”

“ And how shall I then interpret it ? ” I asked, in a voice meant to be full of the tenderest meaning.

“ Captain Bruce, I am not a diviner, nor a prophetess, nor a witch. I can neither look forward into the future nor peer into the depths of your mysterious mind. You had better go to town and consult the new clairvoyante. *En attendant*, here, to encourage you, is something that means ‘ perseverance ’—it is nearly as grand as a peony ; ” and she gave me a blossom of magnolia.

I pressed it to my lips, and was gasping and gobbling in abortive attempts to say something critical, when she broke up the *tête-à-tête* by moving towards the house, saying, “ That concludes our lesson in botany for to-day. I am very much pleased with your progress ; your discovery of the fern is really a most hopeful sign.”

I was at the Hermitage again next day, and Lady Rose opened the subject of the Burridge controversy.

"I have taken your advice, Captain Bruce," she said. "I have spoken to my cousin; she has told me the story."

"It is a strange one, is it not? and you now look on Captain Burridge in a different light?"

"Certainly it is a strange story, and certainly I do look upon Captain Burridge in a different light; but do not imagine that I have exalted him into a hero of romance."

"I did not expect that; I thought you would be touched by his misfortunes; I thought that the generosity which led him to his first false step would intercede with you when you came to judge of his error with regard to your cousin."

"One cannot help pitying his hard lot, of course; but it would be odd morality, would it not, to say of an unfortunate criminal, 'Poor fellow! he has had desperate sorrows and trials, and if he has committed a murder or two we must stretch a point for him; for this wretch on whom Fate has been so hard, and who has shown that he has some human feeling—'"

"That is rather an extreme view."

"It is quite a fair one. I want to show you that I recognise no excuse for Captain Burridge's conduct to my cousin, however I may pity him; no excuse but one that is not flattering, and that is, his own miserable weakness. If I admit that he is upright and honourable, as you say, I can only do so with the qualifications which complete Thackeray's definition of the Heavy Dragoon."

"You are very severe. Consider the strong temptation, the violent excitement which hurried him into

a declaration, and that he would at once have recalled it, but for what happened."

"Oh! I consider all that; but I remember that he saw her frequently before the night of his declaration—saw her frequently—fostered his own feelings and encouraged hers—in fact, deliberately took the steps which were sure to lead to the catastrophe which did happen; but then I consider his previous career—I have had an outline of it, you know—and as he appears to have been made a dupe of on all hands, why, I give him the benefit of the milder solution: if he is not a knave, Captain Bruce, there is but one alternative description, and, in my mercy, I select that. You are loyal to your friend. I like loyalty; it is a great quality; but you are the last man whose judgment I should expect to be warped by that or any other consideration, in a question either of principle or intelligence, and I expect you to agree with me."

I had never seen her more in earnest, and I must confess that these delightful expressions as to myself made her small opinion of my friend much more palatable than it would otherwise have been.

"Oh!" I replied, "I don't pretend that he is a genius, though I will not go the length of admitting your 'milder alternative; ' all I say is, that he is a right good fellow—devoted to your cousin—and that he is a man of whose affection no woman need be ashamed. After all, great intellect on either side is not essential to a happy marriage."

"Well, perhaps you are right. I confess that weakness does not appear to me to be a fascinating qual-

ity ; but everything else granted, how is the obstacle to be removed ? that is the question. You dubbed yourself a knight-errant in the cause. You see some sphere for your exploits, I suppose ? some fire and water to go through. You are not going to tilt hap-hazard at windmills like Don Quixote ? What is your scheme ? ”

Now I had become conscious that, in my protestations of yesterday, I had been, in fact, talking hideous nonsense, making vows and undertakings of which I could foresee no realisation ; and at this moment the exceeding unknightliness of the service that could alone rescue Burridge—viz., the collection of unpleasant statistics as to Carlotta’s present life—stood out in such ludicrous relief against my chivalresque phrases, that I fairly laughed out. I turned it off, however, by remarking on female curiosity, and vaguely assured her that she would see.

“ Well, Captain Bruce,” she said, with great earnestness, “ my cousin’s happiness is above all things dear to me. It is torture to me to witness her silent suffering, her hopeless despondency—she who was like a sunbeam wherever she came. It is torture to me to witness all this without the power to comfort or help ; and if her union with Captain Burridge is to secure, really to bring back, true happiness to her——”

“ I will answer for it ; I will guarantee it,” I cried.

“ I accept your guarantee : perhaps I have been hard upon your friend. You have had opportunities of judging of him, and, notwithstanding all I have said, I *respect* your judgment, I *trust* you ; I *know*

you would not deceive me, and I *will* hope with all my heart and soul that your efforts will soon be triumphant. You have zeal for your friend, you have humanity to inspire you, and—and—you have my—my best wishes, if they are of any importance."

"You cannot imagine how happy you make me by these words, and never man had such inducements to exertion as I have," I replied, again forgetting that my exertions must be rather those of Inspector Tanner than of Sir Galahad. "I shall look forward to claiming my guerdon ; I shall think of that rose——"

"Are you really so anxious for such a trifle ?" she inquired, looking at me earnestly, as if surprised.

"A trifle? it is everything to me—it is life to me ; and when I have won it—when I have won this *symbol*, Lady Rose, I warn you that I shall be bold in my interpretation."

A bright blush suffused her beautiful face, and she said falteringly, "A symbol did I say!—did I promise that it should be a symbol?"

"You did not *promise* it, but you will not be so cruel as to take all the hope out of my life?"

Lady Rose lowered her beautiful eyes, and I was just going to begin my interpretations *d'avance*, when lo ! that *pessima tigris* Mrs Badger bounced round the corner of the walk, and broke up our interview with strident cries of "Luncheon ! luncheon ! luncheon !" Disappointed, but not desponding, I went away that day, for in my heart I felt that this lovely prize might be mine.

CHAPTER XII.

"There are cozeners abroad; therefore it behoves men to be wary."
—*Winter's Tale*.

Pure happiness comes only to us mortal men, if it ever comes at all, in swift electric flashes, that are gone while we are yet wondering at the phenomenon. The *conviction* of my hopes sent such an electric thrill through my heart, but ere yet its intense vibrations had pulsed themselves away, ever-watchful Care was up and doing. I had thought of my love, of wooing and winning, in an ethereal and abstract way; to hear Lady Rose confess that my love was requited—that had been my goal, and I had looked no farther. But now that there dawned a possibility of reaching it, Care, who never seems to abandon one method of torture till she has secured another, was ready for me. "Wooing and winning," quoth she, "are simple enough—though, by the by, the latter is no certainty for you yet—to woo and to win are matters of every-day occurrence; but you know it is proverbially rare to wed the object of your first love. How are you to marry? What is your income? You wince, but that is the main question after all. Sordid? of course it is; what isn't, pray? Can you pay rent and taxes, wages, weekly bills, monthly bills, yearly bills, for an establishment such as you can ask a lady to share? What is your income? Consider. Out with it!" It unfortunately called for

no deep financial calculation to arrive at the sum in question. The pay of a captain, a heavily-mulcted £200 a-year, and £300 a-year of my own in the Funds—it was a case of very simple addition; and this was all I had, and all I could ever calculate upon as a certainty. That was bad; it was desperately bad.

The failure of the three-hundred-a-year marriages, so much talked of once, has no doubt been painfully demonstrated long ago. It is perhaps to the mortal writhings of some of the poor birds who were taken captive by that specious lure that all the commotion in the provision market is due, that the face of the public is sharpened against that *draco reluctans* the West-end tradesman, and that all the world co-operates and becomes its own grocer. The three-hundred-a-year fallacy, or any fallacy in any way approximating to it, I was in no danger of falling into. I had plumbed the capabilities of £500 a-year. I knew that income was barely sufficient for my own somewhat frugal wants—how, then, was it to do for two, even with grievous sacrifices on both sides? “I think you can scarcely miss the absurdity of the idea,” remarked Care, as she plumped down with a heavy thud upon my soul.

“Dolly, old boy,” I said that night to my double, who was as usual lounging in my hut, “I am infernally miserable!”

“So am I,” replied Dolly, stolidly.

“That of course I take for granted—there’s no novelty in that, and it doesn’t remedy my case, which is novel.”

"What's the row, eh? Badger cut up rough? or is it duns or what?"

"Nothing of the sort—I begin to think Lady Rose likes me, Dolly."

"Oh! that makes you miserable, does it? You're just like Dick Footrup; he was always spooning after some one—always desperately in love till he had managed to make the girl care for him, and then he was sick of it at once, and anxious to be off. 'A fellow can't hunt a dead fox,' he used to say; he was nailed at last, though, by an American widow—very yellow and hideous—and I think it served him right; but I thought you were a different sort altogether."

"So I am, Dolly, I hope; that isn't my case at all. I've only just begun to think it possible that Lady Rose might accept me; and if she does, why, what am I to do?"

"Do? Write to her father, then to your lawyer, then to your tailor—nothing simpler."

"But, my good fellow, I'm awfully hard up."

"Sell your horses then; by the by, you haven't got any except little Cross. Well, then, draw on me—how much do you want to tide it over?"

"It's not an affair of tiding over, my good fellow; I want enough to tide over the whole of our lives,—enough to keep up a respectable establishment and support a family."

Dolly's eyes opened very wide. "I don't quite understand," he said (and it *is* odd how hardly some men can understand difficulties, particularly of finance, which they haven't experienced)—"I don't quite understand; but why not do lots of post-obits?"

“Post-obits?”

“Yes, I never did myself, because I was never really hard up; but lots of our fellows do, and it seems to answer; they live like fighting-cocks: yes, Donald, post-obits are your game, you may depend upon it;” and he gave the opinion with the gravity of a Chancellor of the Exchequer recommending an extra penny to the income-tax.

I had to explain to him the theory of post-obits, and that I had but £500 a-year and no expectations of any disposable value. “I thought you had a rich aunt,” he said, after ruminating.

“So I have, but what of that?”

“Draw her, of course.”

“Easier said than done. I’m not necessarily her heir, and I don’t fancy sponging on the old lady while she’s alive.”

“But, if you can’t be sure of being her heir, you can’t be sure of sponging on her after she’s dead.”

“Well, then?”

“Well, then, you might never sponge on her at all!” And he said this as if, by some law of nature, every created aunt must either in life or after death be subjected to a sponging process. “I think it’s all confounded nonsense and pride,” he went on, with more than usual animation. “What has the old woman got to do with her money? If the marriage doesn’t come off, there may be a breaking of hearts. I suppose the old lady wouldn’t like that? She’s not an ogress, is she? Now if she offered you a settlement, do you mean to tell me you would refuse it?”

"I don't say that, but that's different from asking her."

"Still it would be sponging, as you call it, all the same; so it's only a false pride about asking that stands in your way."

"Perhaps you're right; but if I did ask, I have no reason to be certain that I should get anything."

"Try, old boy—try; it's your only chance, as far as I can see; and you must have *something* to offer when you propose to the father, you know. In my opinion the aunt must undoubtedly be devoured."

"I will think it over," I said.

Burridge had certainly given me a ray of light. My aunt was good-natured in the highest degree, liked me immensely, was very rich, and I could not but feel certain, from her little weakness already alluded to, that a niece with a title would be an irresistible inducement to her (if she required one) to be generous. But my friend was right: it was the asking, I fear, not the receiving, that was distasteful.

"I've been thinking," Burridge went on—"I've been thinking that I should go up to town and see these lawyers again about my affair."

"Certainly," said I, "and I should like much to go with you. I wish to hear their views and set my brains regularly to work about it. I'll go with you any day—why not to-morrow?"

"All right—there can't be a field-day—let it be to-morrow. You can call and see your aunt, too, and sound her; and if you think I can be of any use I might drop in to look for you, eh?"

"Thanks, old fellow; we'll settle that to-morrow."

The next morning we accordingly went to town, and drove first to the office of the lawyers, Messrs Frowster, Drencher, & Trapp.

Sir Galahad was in the saddle at last. We were received by the senior partner, Mr Frowster, a sedate stork-like, spectacled man—utterly bald, except on a ridge at the extreme back of his head, suggesting the idea that a gale of wind had been suddenly arrested there in the act of barking him. His manner was dry, his voice rusty, his words precise and carefully chosen—so many of them went to the six-and-eight-pence, probably, and he respected them accordingly.

“Good morning, Mr Frowster!” cried Burridge cheerily, as he plunged into the room.

“Morning, sir,” said Frowster, looking mistily at him through his spectacles. “Be seated—business?”

“Oh! the old business, of course; how is it wagging, eh?”

“Ahem! you refer to——?”

“To the business about my wife that shouldn’t be.”

“I remember now: this gentleman is your brother, of course?”

“No, my friend Captain Bruce.”

“Confidential?”

“Close as wax.”

A pause, “How is it wagging?” continued Dolly.

“I must ask you to explain,” said the lawyer, upon whose business ear Burridge’s jaunty tones seemed to jar.

“Any news of the woman?”

“Well, no—not in one sense.”

“Which of the senses do you mean?”

"You are aware she had been lost sight of for a time?"

"Yes."

"She has, however, written from Paris for a remittance within the last week."

"Thought she would—the cormorant! Is any one looking after her there?"

"We have lost no time; Lapin has been instructed—she could scarcely be in better hands; but we have as yet no intelligence at all serviceable."

"Hang it!" groaned Dolly. "I don't believe you fellows are half sharp. I don't believe I'll ever get quit of her: what a heartbreaking thing it is! I wonder if she would take ten thousand pounds to commit suicide; do you think she would, Frowster, eh?"

"I must beg of you to recollect yourself, sir," said Mr Frowster, with awful dignity.

"I'll tell you what," cried Burridge, quite unpeneetrated by the lawyer's wrath, "I want you two fellows to knock your long heads together and see if you can hit off anything."

Looking at Mr Frowster's denuded skull, which was supplied with a formidable array of knots and knobs, I could not help thinking that it would be a most uncomfortable object to be in collision with. On that gentleman's mind the metaphor produced a different effect; he glared at Adolphus and half rose, then commanding himself said, with calm severity,—

"If you imply (for I confess your language is somewhat incomprehensible)—if you imply a wish that I should commune with your friend, I will make two

observations,—first, that I should imagine you had had enough of extra professional advice; and second, that our firm confers only with principals or their agents."

"All right, there's no difficulty; I'll make you my agent, Donald. Now then, fire away, Frowster; you can have no objection now. What salary are you to have, Donald?" and he laughed.

"Captain Burridge," gasped the lawyer. "Sir—Captain Burridge, I must take the liberty of making two remarks,—first, that your tone is grossly unbusiness-like; and second, that it is not what our firm expects or is accustomed to—it hurts its professional feeling."

"I'm very sorry," said Burridge; "I didn't mean to hurt its feelings—I beg its pardon; but why not have a palaver with Bruce?"

Here I interposed with my suavest manner. "I am quite aware of your professional etiquette, Mr Frowster—I would be the last to offend against it; but as Captain Burridge and I are constantly together, and on the most confidential footing, and as he is not much acquainted with business, I believe it would be well that I should understand the case in its legal aspect. I could advise him in his correspondence with you, and so on; and I am sure he will not object if I ask you kindly to look on me, for the moment, as the principal; and perhaps, Adolphus, if you were to leave us to ourselves for a few minutes we might get on quicker."

"With all my heart—my name is Easy," cried

Adolphus, jumping up; and the lawyer made no objection. "And mind you, Frowster, you must listen well to what Bruce says: he's a fellow to give you a wrinkle; I'll back him against twenty professionals; keep your back straight and your ears open;" with which parting shot he was off.

Mr Frowster breathed short and hard, and stared at me through his dim spectacles; the firm's feelings were so completely paralysed that its mouthpiece was for a moment without power of speech. "Your friend," he said at last, "permits himself a latitude of speech to which we are utterly unused. I am a good-natured man myself, but the firm cannot tolerate such things. It does not permit slang in business matters. Other houses may have different systems, but with this firm business is a sacred thing; a jest insults it, slang outrages it."

"I am sure," I said, "Captain Burridge has not the slightest wish to offend; but he is a little peculiar and ignorant of the world, which you, as a man of the world, will forgive; and now, not to waste your valuable time, may I ask if there is no hope of proving this marriage void?"

"We have no doubt that the marriage is a sound one."

"What is to be done then?"

"We can only trust to the acuteness of Monsieur Lapin and our other correspondents; but I am bound, with regard to the lady, to make three remarks—first, she is very wary; second, she is no longer young; third, without her assistance we can do nothing;"

and he gave a little rusty laugh—the firm was permitting itself a pleasantry.

“Can I be of no use then?” I said desperately, remembering my vow.

“None, sir, but you may do much harm by indiscreet zeal.”

“It looks like a dead lock.”

“It suggests the idea, certainly.”

“Is there *no* device then?”

“Yes, sir, there is a device—a common device—a powerful device—but a dangerous and an expensive one.”

“And that is?”

“If I mention it take note of two things—first, I speak not as the firm; second, not as a lawyer, but simply as James Frowster, gentleman.”

“Certainly.”

“Other houses work with it as a common instrument, but we are particular—very.”

“What is it?”

He dropped his voice and craned his long neck across the table.

“To arrange pecuniarily with the female party—not to put too fine a point on it—to purchase her collusion. What do you think of it?” and he peered at me curiously through his spectacles.

“Think of it, sir?” I cried. “I think it would be infamous.”

“Infamous is a strong word—actionable. We should never use actionable expressions; the device has been resorted to by persons of respectability, I

believe, but it is foreign to the practice of Frowster, Drencher, & Trapp. If it was mooted to that firm, sir, *as a firm*, it would be repelled, I feel certain, with heat. Pray do not suggest it to your friend ; he is rash ; he might not be able to resist so certain a solution. It would cost him," he said, musingly—"let me see—not less than twelve thousand pounds—an immense sum; he would, of course, revoke the annuity of five hundred a-year—and, I think—three and two are five, and one six, and three nine, and three twelve;" he appeared to be checking off the different items of which the grand total was to be composed—"yes, I think it could certainly be arranged for twelve thousand—an awful sum, sir—but he is rich and eager and reckless" (he kept looking at me over his spectacles), "and might be glad to purchase happiness even at that figure. On the whole, I would not suggest it to him. If he came to this firm, *as a firm*, I incline to think he might be repelled with heat ; they might even decline farther relations ; that would depend. The danger of suggesting it to him (*our* danger, that is) would be that he might *privately* arrange the collusion and then come to this firm, who, all unwitting of the *mala fides*, might give him the benefit of their vast experience in matrimonial causes. The firm could not be responsible for that. But if they discovered it after, it might probably produce a painful impression on them. I think perhaps it would be prudent to abandon your idea of suggesting it to him ;" and he gave me one of his queer looks.

"Thank you for imputing it to me. I never dreamt

of such a vile idea, and I am sure Captain Burridge would recoil from it, as I do—being a gentleman."

"I am confident reflection would correct his first thought, as it has convinced you," said Mr Frowster, with much dejection in his voice. "There is nothing like honour. It is the watchword of this firm. I think we can say no more?"

"I think not. Good morning."

I found Burridge at the door. "Well," he cried, "have you settled anything?"

"Nothing as yet; we must have patience. I'm not much taken with your legal adviser, Adolphus."

"No more am I; he's a horrid old prig."

"Who recommended him to you?"

"Oh! he used to do all the post-obit business for the regiment, but they've cut him now for sending a writ to one of the fellows."

"I think we had better put your case into other hands;" for it struck me this intensely sensitive firm might easily get a free command of money from Adolphus, start the collusion scheme on their own account without his authority, and fatally compromise him. He was evidently one of those fellows born to be the football of fate, every new kick sending him into the clutches of some new and yet more rascally operator. So we agreed to transfer the business to the hands of my own lawyer, for whom I could vouch.

CHAPTER XIII.

"For suddenly a grievous sickness took him,
That makes him gasp and stare and catch the air."

—*Henry VI.*

"I know my physic will work with him."

—*Twelfth Night.*

"It's time for luncheon now," said Burridge, as we left the lawyers'; "let's go to the Rag and feed there."

"I was thinking about my aunt," I replied; "not that I can do any good about what we were talking of last night—I never could muster enough of brass for that; but I ought to go and see her, I think."

"Let me go with you," said Adolphus; "I would like to see your aunt; I'm rather a connoisseur in old ladies. She'll give us a good luncheon likely, and there's no saying what may happen; I'm hungry and will eat freely; you shall be gloomy and refuse everything; if you're hungry, so much the better, it will make you pale; then you must sigh a good deal, and drink an immense lot of cold water; then break a few things,—not expensive things—that might disgust her—perhaps groan a little and mutter something about your poor head. See? eh? That will fetch your aunt, or she is unworthy of the name. She'll say, 'What's the matter, Donald? It distresses me to see you in this state. Confide in me. What is it?' and you'll say, in a faint voice, 'Nothing, aunt—nothing; don't distress yourself about me; we

all have our little troubles : ' and then try to look jolly for a moment, and talk about the opera, and then get worse and groan again, and break something more. Then your aunt is sure to write for an explanation, and you'll have it all out with her ; she'll settle a fortune on you ; you'll marry Lady Rose, and—and live happy ever after. Now what do you think of that ? '

"A splendid programme," said I, laughing, "except the fasting ; I'm as hungry as a hunter, and never could resist the luncheon."

"Well, then," cried he, earnestly, "come to a pastry-cook's first, and eat a lot of jam-tarts and stuff ; perhaps they'll make you a little ill—so much the better : come on."

"Nonsense, my good fellow ; I'll be guided by circumstances ;" so we hailed a hansom and drove to my aunt's.

"She was at home and just going to luncheon," the butler said.

"Now mind your cue," whispered Burridge, as we ascended the stairs ; "a worn smile as you enter, and try to totter a little in your walk."

The last remark was unfortunate, as it sent me into the drawing-room with a broad grin on my face. The weather was intensely hot, and my aunt was, as I have said, corpulent,—"a rosy aunt of purple cheer." Wallowing in an easy-chair at an open window, fanning and panting, we found the good lady. She looked the impersonation of good-nature in distress, like the hippopotamus in the dog-days, or a plethoric captain of volunteers at a midsummer field-day.

"Donald at last!" she cried, her face radiant at once; "I thought you had forgotten me altogether."

"Here I am at last, aunt; I've not been to see you for an age, but to make up for it, I've not only come myself, but brought my double; so this ought to count for two visits. Let me introduce my particular friend, Captain Burridge."

"I'm delighted to see you both; but, dear me! it's very odd—isn't it? very striking, I mean—is it noticed?—the likeness between you?"

"Noticed, my dear aunt! It has been a source of great confusion and endless mistakes; and as to its being noticed, it's been alluded to in the 'Times,' and 'Punch' has been on it two or three times," said I, as usual irresistibly provoked by my aunt's power of wondering to minister to her taste in that direction.

Burridge, taking, as he thought, his cue from me, ventured to remark, looking guilty, "It was mentioned in the House the other day."

"Indeed!" cried my aunt. "How was that?"

"Oh! quite incidentally," said I, distrusting Burridge's powers in this line of art; "but it shows you how notorious the thing is. I believe the Queen wishes to have us photographed as the Corsican brothers. For my part, I hate such publicity."

"Why?" cried aunt Blogg; "I think it's delightful: it makes you the fashion—everybody knows about you."

"Oh, we've had enough of that, Adolphus! haven't we? One soon tires of being a lion."

"It is so *very* odd I haven't heard of this before," said my aunt; "yet I was at the Mansion House ball

t'other night, and had a long talk with Lady St Ubbs, who is *quite* in the *beau monde*, and she never mentioned it."

"*Is* Lady St Ubbs in society?" I inquired, superciliously. "*I* never met her—did you, Dolly?"

"I can't say I ever did; but then I'm not much about, you know."

"No; but wherever you *do* go is always in the first flight" (a piece of intelligence which seemed to surprise my friend a good deal), "and either you or I must have met her if *she* had the *entrée*. I'm afraid, aunt, Lady St Ubbs is not in *our* set;" and I spoke as if, with every wish to make the best case for my aunt's friend, my conscience compelled me to bring in this damning verdict against her ladyship.

"Dear me!" said the innocent old lady, with unconscious satire, "she talks as much about fine people as you do, and seems to know them."

"Ah, aunt! we mustn't believe everything everybody says; for my part, the more I hear a man talk about swells, unless he is notoriously one himself" (and I implied by my manner that this was my predicament), "the less I believe him to know about them."

"Oh Donald! bless me, I quite forgot!—talking of grandes, have you seen any more of that beautiful bewitching Lady — ?"

"Excuse me, aunt, the subject is unpleasant to me; and talking of lions, they have appetites you know, at feeding-time. Are you going to give us any luncheon?"

"To be sure, my dear; it was announced before you came in: let us go down."

"The likeness is very great, I must say," said my aunt, when we were seated at luncheon; "but you'll forgive an aunt for saying, Captain Burridge, that it's not a compliment to Donald."

Now why should a thoroughly good-natured person, if ever so much an aunt, say a thing like this? it can please nobody, and is most likely to give mortal offence to somebody; yet nothing is commoner with ladies of a certain age and class than remarks of the sort in favour of their own kith and kin. Why?

Burridge was insensible about his personal appearance, and it fell harmless upon him. "I'm quite aware, ma'am" (he would call my aunt "ma'am"), "that it's a great compliment to me; but just at present I feel I have a better chance with Donald than usual."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that, looking so haggard and ill and miserable as he is doing, of course his beauty suffers," replied Burridge, who having vainly endeavoured by telegraph to dissuade me from any active participation in the meal, was now cutting out a line for himself.

"Ill and haggard!" cried my aunt, "I vow I don't see it; he's looking as rosy and well as I ever saw him; I don't think I remember him with such a colour."

Nor is it likely she should; he who has soldiered a hot summer at Aldershot, and has been exposed to the daily dust and sun of that awful *Campus Martius*—the Long Valley—may remember what his complexion was. To me the sun had been very unmerciful: my

nose, which was of a prominent boldness, had been transformed by its action to the semblance of a red-hot poker; and for the rest of my face, there was only one streak of white in it across the upper forehead, marking the line of the forage-cap. You seldom see a more complete picture of health than an Aldershot man in summer, and I was an exaggerated specimen of the type.

"As to his colour, ma'am," cried Dolly, "that's hectic."

"Hectic! what, his nose too?"

"Hectic, ma'am, decidedly," insisted Dolly, gravely. "The doctor said so last night to me when we were consulting about his symptoms; 'he's as hectic as the ——as possible—nose and all,' were the doctor's very words. Don't interrupt me, Donald: we're all very uneasy about him down there, ma'am; he conceals his symptoms, but he can't deceive us: there's something far wrong, frightful blue dev—, I beg your pardon, ma'am—great depression—mutterings—want of sleep—want of appetite—he's eaten nothing but ship's biscuit and cold tea for a fortnight—and—and a baked potato, at the colonel's urgent request, last Sunday. Yes, you're right, ma'am, he *is* eating now" (for I was performing prodigies with a cold pie, and my aunt remarked it), "but it's a false appetite: don't give way to it, my dear fellow—think of the reaction; the colonel says it's the lungs, the regiment think it's the liver, I say it's the heart, the doctor says it's all three, induced by anxiety and distress. Pray speak seriously to him—exert your authority, ma'am, for he neglects *our* advice." And Burridge concluded his

lengthy and spirited effort by a profusion of furtive winks at me. My poor aunt looked fairly puzzled. On one side sat the mendacious dragoon slowly uttering his dismal report; on the other sat I—the patient—hale and hearty, stout and rubicund, eating as it became a lion.

“What does this mean, Donald?” faltered the good lady. “What is the matter?”

“Oh! nothing, aunt; only a delusion of Burridge’s—a joke of his;” for I could not bring myself to support the clumsy romance of my friend.

“There, ma’am, that’s the way he goes on; we can make nothing of him, and if you can’t, I don’t see what’s to happen. More pie? that’s only to deceive you, ma’am; remember yourself, Donald—think of the nausea. Did you take the palpitation drops before starting?”

“No, I didn’t: what nonsense you talk!”

“Ah! I see I must have a serious conversation with him,” said my aunt, now convinced there was something wrong.

“Thank you, ma’am,” said Dolly, fervently; “it’s the only thing that can save him.”

Luncheon being ended, we returned to the drawing-room; and here, remembering I had an urgent letter to write, I asked my aunt to let me do so. “And meantime,” I said, “you might show Captain Burridge your collection of curiosities.”

“With all my heart,” said the good lady. “Will you come into the anteroom, Captain Burridge? not that I have anything worth exhibiting.”

My aunt’s collection was certainly not of special

interest, though, notwithstanding her disclaimer, she looked upon it as a British Museum in miniature. There was the sword of a sword-fish, the one or two inevitable cases of South American stuffed birds, an ostrich's egg, a canoe-paddle, some coins, a spurious autograph of Mary Queen of Scots, a Bible that had (not) belonged to Oliver Cromwell, bits of the wrappings of a mummy, &c. &c. &c.; but the principal gem of the collection was—rather a Byronian one, it must be confessed—a human skull. And here I must mention, that at the time she made uncle Blogg the happiest of men, my aunt was a widow. My uncle was Number Two. As to Number One there was a slight historic haziness. My aunt alluded to him but in a general way to the world, and not often; but when she did, she spoke of him as "the General." He died at the age of twenty-three, and his miniature, in a nondescript uniform, enriched her museum. Gazing, as a boy, on that work of art, I used to think that promotion must have gone very fast in those days, and even went so far as to examine history for some record of the splendid deeds which had won, thus early, his exalted rank for General Hanks—but in vain. At last an uncle of mine, whom I was always badgering on the subject, inconsiderately lost his temper, and remarked as to the deceased warrior, "General! general, be hanged! no more a general than my grocer is: he was a deputy-assistant-commissary-general—a grade inferior to that of an ensign, or rather no grade at all—and his greatest exploit was purveying rum and pork to a small force sent out against some savages somewhere

—and, by the by, I believe the said savages ate him at last."

This was a terrible blow to me, as in my childish reveries General Hanks had figured as a sort of Bayard—habitually mounted on a white charger, with flowing mane and distended nostrils, always at full gallop—the warrior's head adorned with a tremendous plume of white feathers, which marked by their presence where the carnage was thickest, &c. &c. &c.

I'm not going to say that the skull was the skull of my mythical hero; but let aunt Blogg describe it herself, as overheard by me sitting at my letter. I had heard it a hundred times before, of course, with a hundred varieties. Burridge affected a deep interest in the museum, and questioned my aunt about everything. At last they came to the skull.

"A skull!" cried Burridge.

"Yes," said my aunt, exulting in that her hour had come, "a skull—neither more nor less."

"Real or sham?" inquired Adolphus.

"Oh! a real human skull, sir; feel it."

"So it is—how nasty!"

"And yet," says my aunt, "it is the relique of a handsome man."

"Was he, was he a relative?"

"No, sir; you see before you the skull of the great Mingery-ghe-Pidgery, Chief of the Dogs-eared Indians. His name means 'Scalper-of-the-wind,'—an awful name, is it not?"

"Terrific. Was he a great dab at scalping, then?"

"Yes, sir; he scalped everything he came across—with one exception," added my aunt, dropping her voice mysteriously.

"I'm glad I never met him," said Burridge; "but who was the fortunate exception?"

"It's quite a little romance," simpered my aunt, according to a formula I knew but too well; "but you wouldn't care to hear it, I'm sure?"

"Indeed, ma'am, I should like nothing so much—I delight in horrible stories."

"Well, this is not *horrible*, exactly; it's thrilling and exciting, certainly. You see my first husband, General Hanks, was employed on the Indian frontier against the Redskins. I accompanied him in all his campaigns, and shared his wigwam in front of the army. The Indians are a stealthy acute race" (this was a stereotyped phrase which always made me laugh), "and their spies may have been said to live in our midst. The great Mingery himself, on one occasion, reconnoitred in person, and saw me through a chink in the wigwam. I was but a girl then, Captain, and I'm an old woman now, so I may say without vanity that I *was* a very pretty girl." Burridge made a sort of gurgling sound at this, apparently to indicate that the present tense was still applicable. "Oh no, sir! I'm past vanity now; but then it was different, and I was, as I say, a pretty girl; and the great Mingery, seeing me through the chink, fell desperately in love with me, and determined to carry me off.

"The General was away foraging at the time. In the silence of the night Mingery and his crew crept

up to the wigwam, scalped seven soldiers and my white maid, and carried me off in a swoon into the thickets. I am bound to say that he treated me with great politeness. He spoke perfect English, and as soon as I came round proposed marriage very deferentially. As well as my fears would permit, I pointed out to him that I was already married to the General. ‘I laugh,’ he said, majestically—‘I laugh at his white nose; nevertheless, since your slightest wish is my law, the barrier shall be removed at once. Here, Swashee-Boshee!’ he said to a gigantic savage, ‘shoe yourself with the west wind, and travel towards the sunrise; take lightning in your right hand, and scalp me this son of the Pale-faces who stands between Mingery and bliss!’ Swashee-Boshee uttered a horrible war-cry, and dashed into the forest, brandishing his tomahawk. I immediately fainted, and remained in that condition the greater part of the day. Whenever I had a gleam of consciousness I saw Mingery standing about thirty yards off, playing a wild air on a tin whistle, which I believe is the first part of their marriage ceremony. But towards evening a sudden shouting arose, and the trampling of feet; and just as I opened my eyes I saw Mingery, with the whistle still between his lips, give a spasmodic leap into the air, turn a complete somersault, and light on the tall plume of feathers which adorned the back of his head. He was shot through the nape of the skull, Captain—there’s the very hole, you see. Then the soldiers closed in, and there was scalping and bayoneting for a good half-hour, for the tribe had rushed from

their ambush on the approach of the troops. My poor General fell a victim——”

“What! did they scalp the General?” cried Burridge, with great enthusiasm.

“No, he fell a victim to a fever contracted that day from malaria and nervous excitement, and died three weeks after. But he decapitated Mingery, and brought his skull home with him, and had it cured by the doctor——”

“What! galvanised? did he grin and chatter horribly?”

“No, no—I mean boiled and scraped; and the General told me, almost with his last breath, to preserve it as a memorial—and so I have, you see. And my poor Blogg used to say, in his laughing way, that he was jealous of the skull—and that’s its history.”

That my aunt had some sort of a foundation for the tale I never doubted. In its present stage of development, however, I suspect it would hardly have been recognised by any of the actors in the drama it professed to chronicle. But then five-and-forty years’ constant wear and tear! what anecdote of mortal man could preserve its identity through such a test? I heard Burridge expressing his delight with the tale, and also his opinion that we mustn’t be too hard on the Scalper-of-the-wind, as he (Burridge) could easily see that the temptation to abduct must have been almost irresistible. I heard my aunt, evidently in great delight, disallow extenuating circumstances to the deceased savage; and then they passed on to other objects. I became engrossed with my letter;

but at its conclusion I was aware that there was silence in the anteroom—or, at least, that it was only broken by a rapid and confidential whispering.

Presently my aunt emerged, and said, “Donald, I’m ashamed to trouble you, but would you do me a great favour?”

“Certainly, aunt; what is it?”

“I have a large sum of money (£300), which has been paid to me this forenoon. I don’t like keeping so much in the house; would you mind taking it to the bank in Pall Mall for me? I’m ashamed to trouble you, and drive you away when you’ve come to see me.”

“I’ll be delighted, of course; but it will do as we go back to the Club, won’t it?”

“No, that’s just it; the bank will be closed: pray take a cab, and come back as quick as ever you can.”

She handed me the notes, and I departed.

On my return, in about half an hour, Burridge was not there; he had remembered an engagement, my aunt said, but would meet me at the Club.

“I have taken quite a fancy to him,” she went on; “so simple and nice and gentlemanlike—and then he is *so* like you, Donald.” My aunt’s manner was very fluttery; there was something in the wind evidently. “He has a great affection for you, dear Donald.”

“Oh yes! we’re particular friends.”

“And his anxiety about your state is quite remarkable.”

“Tut, aunt—my *state*! What rubbish the fellow has been talking!”

"No rubbish at all, I can assure you," she said, with a look that beamed intelligence; "to be frank with you, I know all about it."

"Which is it then, aunt? Is it the lungs, or the liver, or the heart?"

"The heart, Mr Donald—the heart. Good Captain Burridge has thought it his duty to let me into your secret."

"Very impudent, then, of good Captain Burridge, that's all I can say," I rejoined, affecting pique.

"I must say, Donald, that you have shown little confidence in me."

"My dear aunt, I won't affect to misunderstand you; but pray what good end is to be attained by whining my miseries at the corner of every street?"

"That's a very different thing. Now good Captain Burridge has told me of your delightful attachment—the lady so good, so beautiful, and of *such* high rank. I am more pleased than I can tell you, dear Donald; but good Captain Burridge tells me you consider your income insufficient, and will not go forward in consequence. *He* thinks the income quite large enough (he is a simple creature), and begged me to persuade you that it was. 'Donald's terribly proud,' he said, 'and he thinks that to ask an earl's daughter to marry him on £500 a-year would be like asking her to live in a poorhouse. I confess,' said the good Captain, 'I can't see it; if the girl likes him, as she does, she likes him for himself, not for his money.' That's all very sensible, my dear, of course, but I agree with you, and I like your pride. Blood is blood, and rank is rank, and much is due to it. It would be ridiculous

to talk of such a marriage on such a paltry income ; and even the good Captain came to see it."

" Yes, yes, aunt ; I know that, and therefore let us change the subject—how are the canaries ? "

" No, Donald—and I'm not pleased with you about this—you hurt me by your distrust in me. You know how I have always loved you ? "

" That I do, aunt, and I'm sure I meant no unkindness."

" Well, why not have come to me and said, ' I'm in distress, help me ' ? "

" I'm not a beggar."

" Beggar ! there's your pride again ! but I like it. Still you know I'm your aunt, and well off ; and to whom should you go, if not to me ? "

" I never meant to go to any one."

" I know that, and good Captain Burridge said, in his droll way, ' I've more money than is good for me, ma'am, and I vow to you, if it wasn't for fear of Donald finding it out, I would anonymously settle a thousand a-year on him, and make him jolly, for I like him better than myself, and I can't bear to see him broken-hearted ; but he's so proud—he would shoot me like a dog, ma'am, if he discovered it.' A noble fellow he is ! but do you think your aunt, who has known you since you were teething, is going to be outdone by a stranger ? Never ! "

What unsuspected depths of cunning and *finesse* this serpent Dolly had discovered ! It was awful ! I felt deeply ashamed of the—of the—well, after all, it was neither a fraud nor a deception—it was only a little—say diplomacy.

"Now, Donald, I've not had time to arrange my ideas, of course, but it just flashed across my mind how delightful it would be if you and dear Rose" (here was a boldish flight of anticipation!) "were to come and live with me! That would settle all difficulties. My establishment would be useful to you; and your society and that of your friends would be delightful to me. I would adopt you, Donald, you and dear Rose, and all your children!" And the good lady looked wistfully at me. There must be a grain of self, I suppose, in the purest benevolence, and I can't help suspecting that at this moment there flashed across my aunt's mind the vision of an *entrée* into circles whence she could command a view of Lady St Ubbs and other existing deities standing outside in the dark—envious but impotent.

"No, aunt," I replied; "your kindness is above anything I ever dreamt of; but that would be too much. Even if everything else suited, it would never do to ingraft a young establishment, with all its new-fangled dissipated ways, upon your well-ordered household. Your old servants" (this was her weak point) "would rebel to a certainty. Besides, I could not give up my profession; though, depend upon it, aunt, if ever I *have* income enough to marry, I would wish that we might be as much with you as possible. There is no one from whom a young wife could derive greater advantage than my dear good kind aunt Blogg." I spoke with enthusiasm — her kindness carried me away into the hyperbolical, I fancy; but I believe I spoke out of true heart. She was a good old soul.

"Well, Donald," she rejoined, "if we can't have a

joint establishment, you shall have one of your own. As to income, just refer his lordship to my solicitor, and I *think* he'll be satisfied. And now, my dear, are you happy?"

"I don't know what to say to you, aunt; it is impossible for me to take this from you. I should feel like a robber."

"Donald," said the old lady, "if you breathe such an idea again, I shall fancy you care more for your childish pride than for Lady Rose, and that you are too selfish to give *me* the happiness of helping you to be happy."

Here was an irresistible argument—at all events I couldn't resist it, and I left the Hotel Blogg treading upon air.

When I found Adolphus at the Club, he looked guilty, and ensconced himself behind a large glass of sherry.

"Oh you scoundrel!" I cried; "oh you deep designing villain!" but Burridge saw by my face that he was considered a benefactor.

"Is it all square, old boy?" he said, eagerly.

"All square, Dolly; but it was infamous of you to play on the old lady's feelings. You are a serpent, Adolphus, the most brazen of serpents."

"Upon my life, I said nothing I didn't mean, except about your aunt being still a pretty girl, and about your living on five hundred a-year. She's a good soul, Donald—a regular trump; but do you know she has some awfully queer notions?"

"I don't doubt it, Dolly."

"Yes, devilish odd, about rank and big-wigs, and

so on. She wanted to know if your children would have any sort of handles to their names. I said certainly, but that I wasn't quite sure what. I thought of telling her the eldest son would be a baronet, and the younger children, male and female, C.B.'s. I think she would have believed it; upon my life, I believe she would."

"Perhaps, but I'm glad you didn't. She's been tremendously kind."

"So she has, God bless her! See me through another glass of sherry, and we'll drink her health. The Scalper missed a right good wife, at all events, whatever her beauty may have been. Here's to her!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"Oh, fickle Fortune! why this cruel sporting?"

My mind was no sooner relieved as to the pecuniary bar to my wishes, than back came all my carking doubts as to Lady Rose's real disposition to me. Sure as one end of the beam flies heavenward, so surely is the other correspondingly depressed; and I was ready, self-torturing, to explain away on the most dismal hypotheses, all the symptoms in my favour which her manner had betrayed. As for that last scene in the garden, from which I had derived so much hope —what was that? what was it but the finishing scene in her little drama, upon which the drop—in the

shape of that old harridan Mrs Badger—prematurely fell? Or, to take another metaphor, she had been playing her salmon, had him wriggling in the shallows, the gleaming “gaff” was in the air, and the *coup de grace*—capturing and slaying at the same moment—would have fallen, but that her felonious hand had been arrested by the arrival of a witness.

But I won’t moralise about Care—we have enough of her in real life—so let me not dismount her from the crupper, or disembark her from the trireme, to usher her into these pages; and let me omit to chronicle how, as I travelled campwards that night, she gnawed me “*iniquo dente*,” and content myself by saying that, writhing under the tortures she inflicted, I wriggled myself into a desperate but calming resolution.

That I should postpone my declaration until Burridge’s affair was cleared up was apparently the ludicrous position in which I stood at present—a striking instance of the nonsense a timid and incoherent lover can bring himself to talk for the purpose of approaching his object under cover. Yes; strictly analysed, it stood thus, that my matrimonial hopes were to depend upon the detection of some possible moral lapse on the part of Carlotta! I blushed—I verily blushed—as well I might, when I found myself *vis-à-vis* with the indecent absurdity of the idea. It was intolerable; and the resolution I came to was this, that, *coute qui coute*, I would cast the die to-morrow. It was past midnight when we reached the camp, but the click of billiard-balls was still audible from the hut devoted to that amusement; and from the win-

dows of the mess anteroom lights still shone. Wishing Burridge "Good-night," I repaired thither. It was tenanted only by a beggarly array of empty tumblers—the *reliquæ Danaum*—and by that one inevitable hazy subaltern asleep on the sofa. Wanting this last feature, the equipments of an anteroom towards the small hours would seem to be incomplete indeed; though why, his bed being adjacent, he should sleep there, seems to fall under the Dundreary category of things incomprehensible. The slumberer was, of course, quickly awakened, and the unfailing Aldershot question propounded, "Is there a field-day to-morrow?"

"Field-day?" yawned the sub—"yes, I should think there was, of the most aggravated description. Under arms at 8 A.M.—twenty rounds of blank ammunition—several Royal Highnesses and an American general. Couldn't well be worse. How they do nag us here, to be sure! but, thank goodness, it's our last."

"How?"

"How! haven't you heard about the *route*?"

"Not I; what *route*? I've just come from town."

"Well, that's good: bless you, the *route* came before mess to-night. We're off to L—— in three days."

"To L—— in three days?"

"Yes, a filthy hole, they say; and a three-company detachment starts for M—— the day after to-morrow. A, G, and F companies;—and, by the by, I forgot; of course, you're to be in command of them. So you're off, the day after to-morrow; and that gets you out

of to-morrow's field-day. The detachment's struck off everything—luck for you—it *will* be a hot one to-morrow."

"Is all this in orders?"

"All of it."

"Surely you're dreaming or chaffing?"

"Why should I? there's nothing wonderful in it, is there? And, by Jupiter! I think we've had our share of the mill; and now, I suppose" (regretfully), "I *must* go to bed."

It was very true, as he said, there was nothing extraordinary in it, but it was such a sudden *bouleversement* of my ideas and plans and wishes, that I could scarcely take it in at first. In the order-book, however, which I found open on my table, there it all was inexorably in black and white; and if farther confirmation were necessary, it was thoroughly brought home by finding that my servant had already packed up nearly everything, and specially those articles indispensably necessary till the last moment.

I was distracted, however, from future woe and present discomfort by one all-engrossing consideration, and that was, that being limited to one day for my operations, I simply *must* carry out my lately-formed resolution, and literally *on the morrow* bring the momentous question of my love to an issue. With a broader margin there would have been room for panic or procrastination; now, there was none. Necessity, mother of invention, only certain inspirer of action! It seems to me that she does not get half enough of credit for another of her attributes, and that is, as a tranquilliser of the mind. This contem-

plation of the inevitable calmed me wonderfully ; and reflecting on the good fortune which had taken me to town on that very day, and on the happy results of the journey, without which I should have been all at sea, I went to bed, determined to rise at *réveillé*, get all business connected with our move over by noon, and devote the rest of the day to the paramount matter.

It needed not the blare of bugles and other early sounds of camp-life to rouse me from my slumbers. They had been deep, but I started from them at sunrise, with a mighty thump of the heart, brusquely inviting me to contemplate the hazards of the day.

Men take a more sanguine view of their difficulties at night than in the morning. I suppose nature kindly so arranges it, in order that sleep may come and gird them up to face with vigour what daylight, the disillusioniser, presents in grim reality.

My sleep had been as sound as possible, and when I rose it was a beautiful morning—not a cloud in all the sky—and the sun looking as if he meant to give it them hot and strong in the Long Valley ; but notwithstanding sound slumbers and the cheering influence of a bright summer morning, I felt no small sinking of the spirit as I began to speculate on what the next few hours were to bring forth.

Fortunately I was not long permitted to indulge in such thoughts ; for very soon began to flow in upon me that stream of visitors which an impending move inevitably draws upon the devoted captain. The adjutant, with sheaves of documents, returns, and in-

structions (for I was to be in command of the whole detachment) ; the paymaster, with his budget of worries ; the quartermaster with his ; my colour-sergeant with a hundred notes and queries ; my pay-sergeant, with many subtle questions of finance ; despairing tradesmen from the town, praying for liquidation on behalf of defaulting privates ; insolvent privates, imploring advances ; the irrepressible soldier's wife, "married without leave," therefore ignored by a paternal Government, and left to the bounty of a patriarchal captain, and inevitably requiring £1, 7s. 8d. to clear her out of the present quarters, and a similar sum to convey her to the scene of new depredations ; my groom for instructions about Crosstree ; Jew hucksters, to know if I was inclined to relieve my baggage by parting with a few articles of dress ; soldiers about to be discharged, to look out for a tip and a character. It took seven good hours' work to dispose of all this ; and it was considerably past noon, and the music of the returning division was already audible, when I found myself putting Crosstree's head, for the last time, in the direction of F—.

As I had had no time for reflection all the morning, so I resolved to give myself none now, and poor Crosstree suffered for the philosophic resolution, having to perform the journey at a pace that vexed even his willing spirit. The familiar objects of the way, at which his speed was wont to be relaxed — the memorable hill, the oracular hedgerow, the grove that had witnessed my earliest demonstrations — these were all passed indifferently ; and it was not till Pan, Syrinx, and the Araucaria were behind me, and the

hall-door of the Hermitage stopped the way, that I drew my rein.

I was conscious of much excitement of manner as I put my stereotyped question, "Mrs Badger at home?" She was at home, and I went up to the drawing-room.

"Gracious heavens! Captain Bruce!" she cried; "what a disappointment! You're not at the Review!"

"No, Mrs Badger, I'm not, and I'm sorry you're sorry I'm not."

"You didn't see them, then?"

"Who?"

"Why, the girls and Badger, and the Melvilles and Morrises—they've all gone over to the camp to see the field-day, and they hoped to pick you up after it, for they're going to make a day's pleasure of it, and picnic ten miles on the other side of Aldershot, I believe. I'm sure they'll be very sorry to have missed you—they're sadly in want of gentlemen, too."

I stared stonily at Mrs Badger; I was benumbed, petrified, and could say nothing, till I was recalled to myself by her question—

"How do you come to be away from the Review?"

"Because—because I've come to say good-bye," I faltered, absently.

"Good-bye? who to? why?"

"I've come to say good-bye to her—that is, to you and Mr Badger and all the little Ba——, I mean the young ladies."

"Captain Bruce, is there anything wrong? You look strange—has anything happened?"

I rallied myself with an effort. I had hardly noticed what the good lady said; I had been engrossed with the thought, "How am I to see *her*?"

"Nothing wrong, my dear Mrs Badger, only I'm the most unfortunate of men. Our marching orders have come, and I'm off to-morrow."

"To-morrow! where? how? why? whatever are we to do without you? I'm quite sorry, I assure you, and we'll all miss you, especially Badger," (bless Badger!) "for you're a prime favourite with him, you know. And is it *quite* fixed?"

"Quite; and I shan't even have a chance of saying good-bye to Mr Badger and your nieces—unless, indeed, you'll keep me here till they come back."

"Gladly would I, but it would be of no use—they don't expect to be back till ten or eleven o'clock. But don't you think you might follow them and find them?"

"I will!" I cried, starting up abruptly, and preparing to depart on the instant. "Good-bye, Mrs Badger. I have to thank you for much hospitality and much happiness. The — road, you say? Good-bye!"—and I should think even her good-nature must have been sorely tried by my curt and unceremonious leave-taking.

A good man is said to be merciful to his beast, and I fear I forfeited on this occasion all title to the epithet, as, with raging disappointment and fierce hope jostling each other in my soul, I mechanically urged Crosstree back, *ventre-à-terre*, to the camp. Dimly, however, from the chaos of my thoughts rose one merciful idea, and that was, that as the length of

my afternoon's journey was indefinite, and as the Captain had already done some work, it would be well to procure some other means of transport; and with this intent I steered straight for the mess-hut, lounging about the door of which I found a score of officers. There was some surprise and some laughter as I tore up at a gallop, and a cry of "Holloa! Maz-eppa! you're late for luncheon—the packing of the mess has begun. We feed no more in the halls where we have revelled."

"I don't want to eat any more; I want some one to lend me a dog-cart for the afternoon."

"You'll find it difficult to get such a thing," said an intensely juvenile ensign with very tight legs, very high gills, and a face of the severest solemnity. "All of us—I mean, all the fellows who really know anything, or take an interest in their cattle, are giving them an off-day to-day. The horses are going up to-morrow, you know;" and he spoke with as much pomp as if he was announcing a change of ministry.

"Then you won't lend me yours, I suppose?"

"Oh! really now, I couldn't. I'd be glad to oblige, but it's a principle I've always stuck to—always rest your cattle before travelling."

Now, six months before date, "the Doctor" at Rugby had, no doubt, frequent occasion to request the pleasure of a *tête-à-tête* interview with this dogmatist.

"But I daresay," he continued, "you might get the pill-box." The pill-box was a fifth-hand brougham which, to the surprise and delight of all beholders, our surgeon had set up.

"Thanks ; the pill-box is too grand for my purpose. Where's Jack Leslie ?"

"Jack ? Oh ! he's *perdu* to-day ; he's been a good deal troubled with duns all the morning, and he's been flitting about like a ghost from place to place. I rather think you'll find him in your own hut ; he went off to try it. He said he thought it was about the safest place ; he had found the paymaster's office and the quartermaster's store both quite untenable, he said."

I went down accordingly to my hut, and on opening the door was greeted with a tremendous shout from the interior room.

"Holloa ! what the de-evil do you mean by disturbing a sick man—a regimental captain—when he's ill in bed ? Leave the hut. you d——d scoundrel, whoever you are."

I advanced to the bedroom, and as I entered it, a figure in the bed dived like a duck under the sheets, whence a deep moaning began to proceed.

"Who's this ? what's the matter ?" I roared through the bed-clothes.

"Go away and don't disturb me, I tell you," responded a muffled voice from the blankets. "I've got tic-doloureux. I'll have you put in the guard-room, whoever you are, as sure as my name's Captain Bruce of the —— Fusileers."

I gave a sharp cut with my whip across the most prominent part of the enveloped form, and Jack Leslie uncoiled himself with a yell of agony.

"Bruce, by jingo !" he cried, sitting up and rubbing himself.

"Yes," I said, affecting wrath ; "get out of that bed, you impudent young villain—how dare you ?" and I gave him another cut with my whip.

"Don't, Donald ; don't be savage. I couldn't help it. I've been hunted like a rabbit the whole morning,—upon my honour I have ; and even when I was in the orderly-room with the Colonel, that beast Chisel, the tobacconist, was flattening his nose against the window, waiting for me, and threatening to come in and report me. This was the only place I could get any peace."

"Get up, sir !" I continued, sternly, "and get me your dog-cart ; I require it this afternoon."

"Do you ?" said Jack, ruefully.

"Yes, I do."

"I was thinking of having a little 'out' myself," he said. "You see we're all asked to dine with the —th, and it would be confoundedly hot, two regiments dining in one hut, so I thought I would tool over to F——, and have a last dinner at 'The Grapes.'"

"Ah ! well, you see, that can't be arranged ;" for what is the good of having a subaltern if you can't use him and all his effects as if they were your own property ?

"Where are you going ?" asked Jack.

"I'm not quite sure—somewhere beyond Odiham to join a picnic party."

"Take me with you ?"

"Well, I don't see why I shouldn't—they want men, and I suppose in a strait of the sort you might pass for one. Go and get your trap, and get some cold stuff from the mess and a bottle or two of cham-

pagne—we had better take a contribution; besides, we may miss the party and have to depend on our own commissariat. Look sharp."

Jack had scarcely left me when my colour-sergeant presented himself. "Detachment to parade at six o'clock, sir, for the Colonel's inspection," said the man.

"To-night?"

"Yes, sir; all hands, in marching order."

"Very well."

I gave myself no time to execrate Fortune and her *celeres pennæ*, grievously as she was deserting me, but walked desperately over to the Colonel's hut.

"Well, Bruce," said he, affably, "and how do your arrangements get on?"

"They were complete at one o'clock, sir," I said, with a Wellingtonian air.

"What! everything? and have you settled your attached men's accounts?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's well, Bruce—very well. It's a mistake to leave things to the last."

"Yes, sir, it is, as you say. You're thinking of seeing the detachment to-night, sir?"

"Yes, at six o'clock. I made it late—I thought it would suit everybody better."

"I came to ask, sir, as I have a *very* special reason, if you could dispense with my presence. Leslie is thoroughly up in the company's affairs" (for I determined, of course, to sacrifice Jack), "and will be able to answer any question, as far as that goes; and as for the other companies——"

Here the chief interrupted me—he was a good fellow, but very particular; and nothing but desperation would have made me prefer the request.

“I’m really astonished, Bruce, that you should ask such a thing—you of all men. It’s a most improper request. I regret that you should have made it. I cannot dispense with your presence. Certainly not.”

The Colonel was angry. I saw the case was hopeless, and left in despair. What was to be done? It was past three o’clock now, and out of the question to go and be back in time for parade. I found Jack in his dog-cart at my door.

“You may put up the trap, Jack—there’s a parade.”

“The devil! when?”

“Six o’clock.”

“Shall you go after?”

“Ah! perhaps: I hadn’t thought of that—there may be time.”

“Let me have the use of your bedroom till parade-time, Donald—or, by the by, will you lend me sixty-five pounds to square these kites? whichever you please.”

“I think I’ll lend you the bedroom, for choice. Jack.”

“Very well,” said Jack, and, handing the cart over to a servant, he retired meekly to his lair in my inner room. Six o’clock arrived, and the parade fell in. The Colonel came to it in a very unchristian temper: my unlucky request had quite upset him. He made a minute inspection of the three companies, and found innumerable little faults, especially with mine. There

were several aggravated cases of long hair, misfitting tunics, absent chin-straps, ill-folded greatcoats—there was an abraded cheek-bone—even a black eye, and the Colonel delivered a lengthy homily on each topic as it presented itself. Then he had to make a valedictory exhortation to the men on good conduct in out-quarters; and, being a slow man, it was half-past seven when the parade was dismissed.

"I'm afraid I've made you late for dinner with the —th, Bruce," said the Colonel; "but I daresay it's no great penance; and, indeed, there are one or two little things I really want to speak to you about still: so come and take a chop with me in my hut, and we'll combine dinner and business. Come along now, for dinner will be ready."

Oh, fate! oh, fortune! oh, execrable Colonel! It was in vain, then, that I had lain down late and risen up early—all my efforts were in vain; and this chop was indeed the vainly-eaten chop of sorrow.

It was an extinguisher—the chance so keenly pursued had eluded me, and fled to the limbo of remote possibilities. What hope was there of its recurrence? when could it recur? Deferred hope is heart-sickness to all manner of men—to a lover, hope indefinitely deferred is akin to despair. "Time," "Absence," "Distance," are words that fill his soul with sinister presentiments; they are the dark antitheses of his burning central thought; they conjure up the idea of a wild ocean of changes and chances rolling between him and his wishes and hungering to engulf his hopes—an ocean fed by all the waters of Acheron, and Phlegethon, and Styx, and Lethe. With these words

ringing in my ears, with these sombre impressions weighing on my heart, I sat with the fatal Colonel at his fatal meal, absent and abstracted, mechanically replying to his peddling pipe-clay twaddle in the stereotyped jargon of routine, and leaving entirely to him the onus of making conversation. He saw there was something wrong; I fancy he concluded that I was offended with his roughish strictures on parade—for his manner was for a time conciliatory. Eventually, however, he lost patience and gave me a pretty broad hint to say good-night at an early hour; and, nothing loath, I betook myself with my heavy burden of grief and disappointment to my hut. There I found Burridge impatiently awaiting me. He had only heard that evening of our impending departure, and had hurried up full of concern to say good-bye and administer consolation. Indeed, my departure was almost as severe a blow to him as to me, for it cut off the only link that kept him in a sort of *rappo*rt with Mary, and robbed him of that confidential daily talk on *the* subject, which is the elixir by which a lover lives in absence.

“I’ll tell you what it is, Donald,” he said, after the lugubrious view of the situation had been thoroughly considered—“there’s only one thing for it. You must get leave and come back here, and stay with me, as soon as ever you can, and carry your matter to a triumphant conclusion. Promise me you will.”

So I did promise, as soon as I had got the detachment settled down, to get leave if possible and return—and—and “try my luck, at least.” I was reduced to this feeble state of mind again.

"It is only *au revoir*, then," said Burridge; as he left.

"I hope so," said I, "but it is a long way, and getting leave may be impracticable, and when I come she may be gone."

"Nonsense: *au revoir*."

"Amen."

The detested journey was accomplished the next day, and hundreds of miles lay between me and Lady Rose.

My first care on arriving was to write a note to Badger, expressing my great regret at missing him when I called the day before to say "good-bye." I told him that my regret was lessened, however, by the expectation of returning to Aldershot very early, where I had been obliged, from our sudden departure, to leave a *most important* matter unaccomplished; and when I did return I hoped to find him and *all his circle* in a flourishing condition.

I knew the letter would be read in open court, and I hoped that the underlining of certain words would convey to Lady Rose a sense deeper than they suggested to the mere Badger.

My hopes of a very early return to Aldershot were, however, much damped next day by a letter from the Colonel, saying that he heard the district was in an unsettled state, and strike-disturbances apprehended; that therefore, until the Major, who was to command us, and who had gone on a month's leave, joined the detachment, he hoped I would "stick very close" to it, especially as the other officers were very young.

To ask for leave was therefore impossible, and there was nothing for it but to await the Major's arrival with what patience I might command. The idea of proposing to Lady Rose by letter occurred to me once or twice in my most desperate moments, but I discarded it; there was an ill-omened smack of the sneaking and the pusillanimous, a sort of vote-by-ballot suggestion, about it that deterred me, and I resolved that by the utterances of the *viva vox* I should stand or fall.

The month passed away, moving with leaden wings. Let those who have been in similar circumstances recall their feelings, and read in them mine, during its progress; and let those who have not be thankful, nor seek to know prematurely what the future may not unlikely have in store for them yet.

The month passed away, and the Major arrived. Bounding like the roe, I went to demand my release.

"No," said the Major; "it is impossible, my good fellow. The inspection may come off any time in the next four or five weeks, and the Colonel's desire is that there should be no leave until that is over."

Was there ever to be an end of this? It was like ascending mountains of unpleasant altitude, when a seemingly endless succession of new summits presents itself to the panting climber.

CHAPTER XV.

" Ther dronkenesse regneth in any route,
Ther is no conseil hid withouten doute."

—CHAUCER: *Canterbury Tales*.

" Donde hombre no piensa salta la liebre."

—*Spanish Proverb*.

The hare starts where one is not expecting it.

Independently of my own internal causes of discontent, the quarters in which we now found ourselves were anything but pleasant,—a large manufacturing town, with an atmosphere vitiated by every chemical abomination; a Radical population, with "rattening" proclivities and a chronic tendency to strike; a millocracy who detested the military, and would none of them; and a neighbourhood of bloated aristocrats who so thoroughly ignored the town that they included us in the ostracism to which they treated *it*. Such was the place in which our lines were cast. I may add that it always rained, that the neighbouring country was level and uninteresting, and for miles round the vegetation was blighted by the noxious breath of the town's million chimneys. Then there was no barrack accommodation for our billiard-table, and the billiard-rooms of the town were unavailable, being infested by unclean and insolent manufacturers; racket-court there was none —nor cricket-ground; and months lay between us

and the hunting season. Altogether there was nothing to be done but eat, drink, sleep, and grumble. To none of these occupations is the British officer averse, yet the honest fellow likes to vary his pleasures like others; and why not? Probably these gloomy accessories mattered less to me than to the others. Self-absorbed as I was, and engrossed in a superior source of trouble, perhaps the dull monotony was even less distasteful to me than would have been a perpetual racket of gaiety. That, however, was by no means to prejudice my right to swell the full-toned chorus of discontent which rose in the barracks from morn to dewy eve, including in a comprehensive anathema the town and all its works, along with that sublime impersonality the Horse Guards, for dooming us to such a sojourn.

Those who had the largest aptitude for being bored declared that it was "the evenings that killed them," and I daresay so it was. There was no theatre nor public amusement of any sort, and desperate were the substitutes, even cheerfully accepted. A temperance lecture advertised for a fortnight previously had really been looked forward to with interest, and well attended from the Barracks. A wild-beast show which had visited the town for three days, and had four exhibitions per diem, was punctually attended by many officers at every diet; so much so, that Jack Leslie declared that the lion, near whose cage they had sat on several occasions, had latterly always risen, grinned, and wagged his tail like a dog on the entrance of the Barrack party.

To us thus bored, then, and clutching at every

straw in the way of amusement, it was a matter of no small excitement to see, one day, the walls and hoardings plastered over with flame-coloured posters inscribed in green letters with the word "*Hurrah!*" and nothing else. There was interest, there was hope, there was promise in the word ; and the detachment said to itself cordially, "By all means—*hurrah!*!" The posters continued to cheer away upon the walls without explanation for three days ; and then came another mysterious inscription in yellow and blue, "Would you believe it?" This enigma was much canvassed. Practical men got angry and said, "D—n it—what?" Others suggested that the mayor had gone mad, &c. &c. &c. ; but no one could make anything of it. Expectation was therefore at its height when a third fulmination at all events asserted something—"Plotski is coming!" It was Plotski's advent, then, that we were invited to hail with jubilation in the first placard, and the almost unearthly happiness of that event that was suggested by the second.

But who the deuce was Plotski? his visit was gratifying, but who was he, and what? Was he a Polish refugee come to lecture on the wrongs of his fatherland? Was he an itinerant dentist, a vagrant homœopath, a conjuror, a wizard, or what not? Conjecture lost itself. Time must show; and it did, for a third placard announcing "He is here," was followed next morning by an inundation of hand-bills on the mess-table finally clearing up the Plotski mystery. These announced that the eminent Signor Plotski, LL.D., of Amsterdam, Buenos Ayres, and

Moscow, accompanied by his wife, the irresistible Madame Plotski (*née* Kartoffel of Bagdad), would, at the urgent request of the leading inhabitants of M——, favour that town with a two days' visit for the purpose of "lecturing (with experiments and scientific demonstrations) on certain phenomena connected with magnetism, electricity, and phrenology in their relation to the human will." This was very gratifying; and nothing could be more satisfactorily dirty and scientific than the appearance of the great man when he presented himself in person that forenoon to solicit the favour of our patronage. In countenance he was one of the most villainous and ill-favoured *savans* it has ever been my lot to contemplate. He wore a fez and black spectacles, and an all-enshrouding frock-coat of rusty black which reached to his heels, and suffered, here and there, to appear at abnormal crevices, hints of some possible linen of an almost impossible griminess. His accent when he spoke was so incomprehensible and peculiar at first that we tried him in French. The sage, however, was ignorant of that frivolous tongue; he said, "yah," and "si," indeed, when interrogated as to his capabilities in German and Italian, but declined farther converse in them, alleging mysteriously that there "*was a cause*" which made *his own* language (which he omitted to name) or "*the Angleesh*" the only fitting vehicles for his thoughts.

"I have come, Gen'ral," he said, addressing the Major—"I have come, Gen'ral and gents, to talk a weesh out of my harrt. You 'av all 'eard of Pittagorass?"

"Oh yes!" said I, "of course we all know about him."

"Then I need not to tawlk about 'im;" and he paused abruptly. "You are aweer of grayvitation?"

"Yes, yes."

"Then I need not to stay long with 'im either."

"You are aweer that the mateeril forces are rig'-lated in their developpmment by a cat'nation of homo-genus causes?"

"Yes," said the Major, frowning, and slowly nodding his head, dense as a turnip, as if making a gigantic effort to grapple with the subtlety of the idea—"yes, clearly so."

"Ferry well, so far; you beleeff in something?"

"Yes," said the Major, sadly bothered.

"You shall disbelieveff it all at my weesh," cried the Professor, snapping a pair of dusky fingers under the Major's nose.

"How?"

"You say four make more nor two?"

"Certainly."

"I shall make proof-ment that eet ees less!"

"Bravo, Professor!" cried Jack Leslie. "I'm a convert already, and I'll be generous enough to pay two bob instead of four for admission to your entertainment to-night—is it a bargain. Reserved seats, mind."

"Silence, Mr Leslie!" cried the Major, who flattered himself he was rather coming out in science; "be silent, sir!"

"Oh! eet ees ferry goot, so far; let 'im say 'is funny word. He shall come in for no sheeling at

all, eef he weel geeve hees body for make exper'ment."

"Thank you," said Jack; "I'll rather go back to the old faith, and pay four bob."

"Ferry goot, so far; but I need not to delarge much now. You weel come, Gen'ral and gents—you weel come to my conversadzyony?"

"Oh, certainly!"

"Here are the permits;" and he produced a bundle of filthy tickets, and distributed them, receiving money "according to the old faith."

"Professor," said an officer who had recently mounted a popular hobby, "I daresay you know something about spirits?"

The Professor looked wistfully at him, but replied, "Tank you, not now; one glass wine—sherry, perhaps."

"Oh, sherry! certainly; but I didn't mean that. You deal in occult science; are you at all given to spiritualism?"

"To all science, sare; but not as a professor. In private I am ferry much with the spirits."

"Major," whispered the spiritual officer, "mighthn't we ask him up to supper after the lecture, and have a little spirit-rapping?"

"By all means;" and the Professor was invited, and gladly agreed to come.

At the advertised hour we went down *en masse* to the lecture-hall. There was a good house, and everything in due order for a meeting of the sort. Greenbaize-covered table on the platform, tumbler and decanter of water, &c. &c. No Professor, however.

Some time elapsed, and the audience began to express their impatience noisily enough. At last, a tall wild-looking woman, with fierce black eyes, came hastily on to the platform, and addressed the meeting. Her utterance was rapid and indistinct, and she spoke in much the same remarkable lingo as that favoured by the illustrious Plotski. This was the irresistible scion of the Kartoffels of Bagdad.

She explained that she was in great distress, that the Signor had just had "one of his ep'lectic fits," which rendered a connected lecture from him impossible that evening. She hoped, therefore, the audience would kindly excuse the omission of the theoretical section of the entertainment, which was the Signor's province, and be satisfied with those practical experiments and demonstrations which were hers. She appealed to the good-nature, &c. &c., of a British audience, and the audience cheered and were content.

Thereafter, in accordance with her invitation, there was a rush upon the platform of candidates for biological treatment.

"My lecture," she said, "is contained in six words —I can! I will! I do!" and straightway she fell to work with much energy and success to the constraint of the wills and the distortion of the bodies placed at her disposal.

What the theory of her operations may have been, I know not; in practice they were very simple. Having secured the attention of her patient, she directed him to stare fixedly into her eyes (and a very evil pair of optics they were) for a longer or

shorter period. She then superadded a few mesmeric passes, or rapidly darted her clenched fists close to his face, suddenly unclenching them as though releasing volumes of compressed magnetism. When this simple treatment was concluded, she pronounced the patient to be "in her power," or "under her control," which in the generality of cases he proved to be. She then ordered him to do her bidding, inviting and defying him to resist and disobey. In a short time she had about twenty subjects thoroughly under command ; and the platform became the scene of a most Bedlam-like spectacle. Here a hapless individual was to be seen working his arms like the sails of a windmill. There another stood, in the attitude of Ajax defying the thunderbolts of Jove, with a sheepish shamedness of face finely contrasting with his tragic *pose*. Another wagged his head as if he would have wagged it off. Another hopped violently on one leg without gaining ground. Another was doubled up with involuntary laughter. A church-warden-like person danced the "Perfect Cure" in a corner, with a deprecating simper on his face. As a central figure a *very* bashful man (keenly alive to his horrible position) vehemently apostrophised the audience as "Ho ! Hangelina ! my hown ! my beloved !" and it was a curious matter of speculation whether the aspirates were under his own control or supplied by the dominant influence. The features of the victims, working with intense spasmodic action—their swelling veins and starting eyeballs—showed that they were resisting, though vainly, the behests of "the Irresistible."

Nothing could be more successful. When the first batch was disposed of there was a call for more, and again and again there swarmed on to the platform scores of fresh assailants, anxious to match their volitions against the singular powers of the woman. It must be confessed that, on the whole, she justified the title she had assumed. At the close of her experiments with the last batch, a "pale head" slowly and cautiously introduced itself at the door of exit from the platform, behind Madame—a pale head adorned with a fez and garnished with black spectacles. Madame was unconscious of the apparition, but not so the audience generally, who beheld with breathless interest what they supposed to be a premonitory symptom of some new *diablerie*, if not of the fiend himself in *proprietà persona*.

"The seance," Madame began to observe, "must now, to my shagreen, feeneesh." The pale head here reinforced itself by the introduction of a villainous-looking claw, which was waved, as if in adieu, towards us.

"Whaar you have seen," continued the lady, "is not much, but it is whaat I can do. The offle malady of Saynior Plotski will not allow his prisence this night—"

"HA ! HA !" ejaculated the head, in the *basso profundo* of a melodramatic ruffian, instantly withdrawing itself.

Madame gave a tremendous start and looked round, and a thrill of expectation ran through the audience. "The offle malady," she repeated, "of me imminent hosband, will not allow his prisence this night. I thank you—farewell ;" and she bolted hurriedly from

the platform, and through the doorway where the vision had displayed itself.

The audience loudly applauded, expecting that this was a *coup de théâtre* to work them up; but Madame not re-appearing, and the officials proceeding to turn out the lights, they broke up mystified and murmuring, as well they might.

A supper had been prepared in the mess-room in honour of the *savant*; and although it seemed that his company could not now be hoped for, we, with the adaptability to circumstance of the military appetite, at once sat down to its discussion. The conversation, of course, turned upon the mysterious Plotski and his strange apparition at the door of the platform.

"My impression is," said the Major, pompously (he had suddenly constituted himself a biological authority)—"my impression is that, standing where he was, the Professor was exerting a magnetic influence upon us; he was compelling us to leave the place without objecting on the ground of an unfulfilled programme. I was quite conscious of a strange sensation when he threw out his hand."

"But what did 'Ha! ha!' mean?" inquired some one.

"Ah! that 'Ha! ha!' meant—I suppose that 'Ha! ha!' conveyed some impression—some—some—eh? to most of us, eh?"

"My impression, Major," said a pert youngster, "is, that the whole thing was a swindle, and when it was all over, 'Ha! ha!' meant 'sold again,' or words to that effect."

"Considering the success of the experiments," re-

plied the Major, loftily, "the word swindle can scarcely apply."

"My impression," said another, "is, that the fellow was beginning to have another fit, and was telegraphing for assistance."

"Yes, that would account for his wife hurrying off as she did."

"At all events," I remarked, "I don't think we're losers by his absence now: a dirtier-looking ruffian I never saw."

"Genius *has* its eccentricities," said the Major, sententiously.

"I wonder if he ever was at Moscow."

"Devil a bit."

"HA! HA!"

The sound proceeded from the doorway, and was the twin brother of the cachinnation lately under discussion. We all started, and looked towards the door, where, sure enough, were the "pale head," the fez, the black goggles, and the waving paw of the Professor.

"I'm a lookin' at you!" he cried, archly applying his forefinger to his nose. "I hear you a-talkin' of me. Talk of the devil! 'devil a bit. HA! HA!'"

"Confound the fellow, he's mad!" muttered the Major, in great confusion.

"Come in, Professor; delighted to see you; just saying what a bore it was your not coming," said I, recovering my presence of mind, and rising to receive him.

"Gammon!" growled the eminent person. "I hear you a-carryin' on about me: but I'll come in: no

malice ; leastways none a drop o' brandy and wa'er won't make all right."

The Signor had apparently acquired the English tongue with considerable fluency since the forenoon, though perhaps not according to the best models.

"I hope you've quite recovered your—your—a—a—little attack, Signor Plotski," said the Major, blandly, as the invalid seated himself.

"Ah ! that was gammon—a trifle of the old enemy, I mean. I'll take some medicine, though, if you'll 'scuse the freedom."

"Oh ! certainly, certainly," said the Major ; "pray take every freedom."

"But you must get it for me."

"Certainly ; but what would you take ? The hospital is at hand—a draught or a pill of any kind ? or——"

"Ha ! ha !" roared the invalid. "Pills be d—d ! brrandy and wa'r to be sure. Why, man alive ! professors and signiors have throats ; they're just like you all ; thirst, thirst, thirst, that's the d'sease — brrandy's the perfick cure. Get's a go o' brrandy, old swivel-eye !"

This was addressed to our very respectable butler, who had a slight obliquity of vision.

"Martin," said the Major, in a manner intended to rebuke the Signor with dignity, "have the goodness to bring a small glass of brandy."

"A small one for the Gen'ral, cock - eye, and a wopper for me," amended the Professor. "I can't abide your timble-fulls of brandy, gents ; they take no grip of the stummick ; what I likes is something

to take me by the hinside, and shake me like a dawg."

We had now a pretty fair notion of the nature of the malady which had prevented the Professor's lecture. It was clear that the great man was far from sober, and was in fact a drunken English blackguard, Moscow, Amsterdam, and Buenos Ayres notwithstanding. At this juncture the Major rose, and muttering something about "an engagement," left the room.

"And now," said Plotski, when he was supplied with a huge beaker full of brandy which he scorned to dilute—"now that old Stick-in-the-mud's gone, let's be jolly! gay young dogs all;" and he shoved back his fez, and took off his goggles, thereby fully disclosing a most villainous countenance and a pair of bleering, blinking, red eyes.

"By the by," he continued, "I don't mind if I pick a bit; any devilled truffles? No? Well, then, a fried hoyster? None? 'Ang it, you've no kweeseen, you coves! When I dine with the Hemperor at Moscow, he's always up to the mark. 'Plotski, my jolly young waterman,' he says, 'I know your 'abits. Your tastes are genteel, but simple—come and feed to-day—taity, taity—no cardinals or nonsense—honly my himperial self—some devilled caivyhairy and four bottles of clo-woojo—in the smoking-room. Don't dress.' Oh! he's a wunner, is the Hemperor! Here's to him. Hurrah! hurrah!" and he drained his tumbler with a gasp of satisfaction.

"Was any of you ever at Aleppo?" he continued.

"Yes," said Jack Leslie, who constituted himself

the chaffer of the mess in general—"yes, I was born there: were you?"

"No, I wasn't born there: I aint *a-leper*. Ha! ha! ha! twig? ah! ha! ha! ha! not so dusty, eh? ha! ha! ha! I wasn't born there, but I was hambassador there wonst."

"From what king?" said Jack.

The Professor blinked at him a moment, and then said, "If any one axes you the question, little pink-and-white, you can say it was from the King of the Cannibal Islands, if you like. I won't contradick you, and you can say I'm a Kokasian if he wants to know any more about me, and that I'll dine with him the first fine Sunday next week."

He emptied his glass, and nodded at Jack with his eye very tight closed, and then favoured us with an isolated scrap of intelligence.

"We drank nothink but 'Tickly-Bisky,' down at Aleppo—nothink; it's strong—it makes me thirsty to think of it: pass the bingo."

"You seem to have been a great traveller, Professor," I remarked.

"Yes, sir," said the Professor, and as his eye rested on me, it seemed to dilate and acquire a look of puzzled and hazy interest, almost of recognition.

"Why—damme!" he stammered, half rising—"damme!—it's—it's—oh! blow me tight! here's a go!" Then he took a pull at his liquor, nodded three times to me with an expression of drunken wisdom, and went on,—

"Yes, I've travelled, sir, all round the horange—I've seen men and manners—I don't mind saying I've

seen a few things. I've been up the Nigel and the Cotty-Wotty. I've topped the 'Imalayas, and I've crossed the Rocky Mountains."

"The Rocky Mountains, have you?" cried an ensign, much interested; "a poor brother of mine went with an expedition there, three years ago, and he has never been heard of since."

"His name, sir?" cried the Professor.

"Wilson," said the ensign.

"Which of the Wilsons, sir?"

"Thomas."

"Thomas Wilson—very fair?"

"As fair as I am," said the milk-white youth, "with a red scar on his cheek."

"That's the man, sir," cried Plotski, decidedly. "Poor Thomas Wilson is no more, sir; we were all starving; drew lots; lot fell on T. Wilson, and he was man-meat in half an hour."

"Wh—wh—wh—what do you mean?" faltered the ensign.

"Why, we ate him, of course. I had a grill of him, and a boil of him, and I had him cold, and then we had him heated up and hashed, and devilish tough the poor fellow was all ways. Give us the bingo till I wash the memory of him off my palate."

I am afraid there was a shout of laughter at this disgusting anecdote, and young Wilson fled from the room.

"Pooh!" said the Signor, "he needn't fret—we all heat each other in the Rockies;" and he plunged into his tankard.

On emerging therefrom his eye again rested on me,

and winked. I returned it vaguely ; he then shook his head and gave a drunken giggle.

"Let's have some spirit-rapping, Professor," said the spiritualist.

"What for ?" said the Professor, on whom his repeated draughts were beginning to make awful ravages.

"Oh ! get them up, and ask them all sorts of things—secrets, you know—you promised you would."

"Did I ?" said Plotski, "then I'll keep the word. Plotski's faithful and true. I don't need to rap. I don't care a rap. I'm a spirit myself. I am—what you want know ? I could tell you all 'bout yourselves. Spirits tell me everything. Tap me. Blaze away." And he winked a very tight wink at me again.

"Tell us when we'll get out of this abominable quarter," I said, rising to leave the room, and putting the question to cover my retreat.

"Don't go—don't leave us, Thingummy," he cried. "I'll tell you—sit down—what was it ?—Oh yes ! I'll tell you——Now I could tell you 'bout yourself. Your name's B—B—B— Hang it ! Your name begins with a B ; don't it, now ?"

"Bravo ! Professor; but any one might have told you that," said I.

"Devil a bit ! You've been in India ?"

"Yes, of course ; but everybody has."

"Devil a bit ! You've been in love." There was a roar of laughter, hints of my condition having got abroad.

"Well," I said, "every one has."

"Devil a bit ! You're married."

"Of course —of course," I said, to humour him.

"But you don't hit it off with the missus."

"Not at all."

"You've not seen her for six years."

"No, I certainly haven't."

"Give me the brandy," said the Professor, looking round the table with drunken triumph, "I'll rest after that; I've told you a thing or two." He took another tremendous pull: the man's interior must have been lined with cast-iron.

"Lawyers can do nothink for you like a clever bird like me. I'll tell you 'nother secret, now. You've paid money to try and g'rid of missus, and you can't—aint you, now?"

"Yes, of course."

"You've gone t'wrong shop—this is sh-shop for you, Bur-burridge, my boy—that's yer blarmed name—I've got you at last." There was a roar of laughter down the table, and the Professor blinked and nodded round at the laughers, like an owl surveying a row of candles, and feeling the worse of it.

I felt as if an electric telegraph had passed through my head. Who was this ruffian? Did he know all about Burridge? Could he be of any use? Had he really got a secret that could help us?

I composed myself and said, "Yes, but the secret, Professor?—the secret? How am I to get rid of this confounded wife of mine?"

"Ah! yes; that's wot you want to know—hic—of course; but the terms?—hic—the rowdies?—hic—the rhino? the flimsies? eh, old Burgage? What'll ye stand?"

"Tell me what you'll do first."

"I shay, d'ye remember Garden Reach? and Count Smufflefrowski a-ridin' through the desert, eh? Oh Lor! how the—how she did pile it up!—hic—mountenious—hic—I call it, oh Lor! She's a clever one—aint she now, Buggy? that blarmed wife of yours?"

"But you forget the secret—the secret."

"What'll ye give to b'rid of the she-male? Can'dly now, Cap'n?—be lib'r'al."

"If you put me in the way of getting rid of her, if you give me real documents that will do that, I'll give you a couple of hundreds."

"Taint enough—I might be lagged myself; but I'll come round and talk a bit."

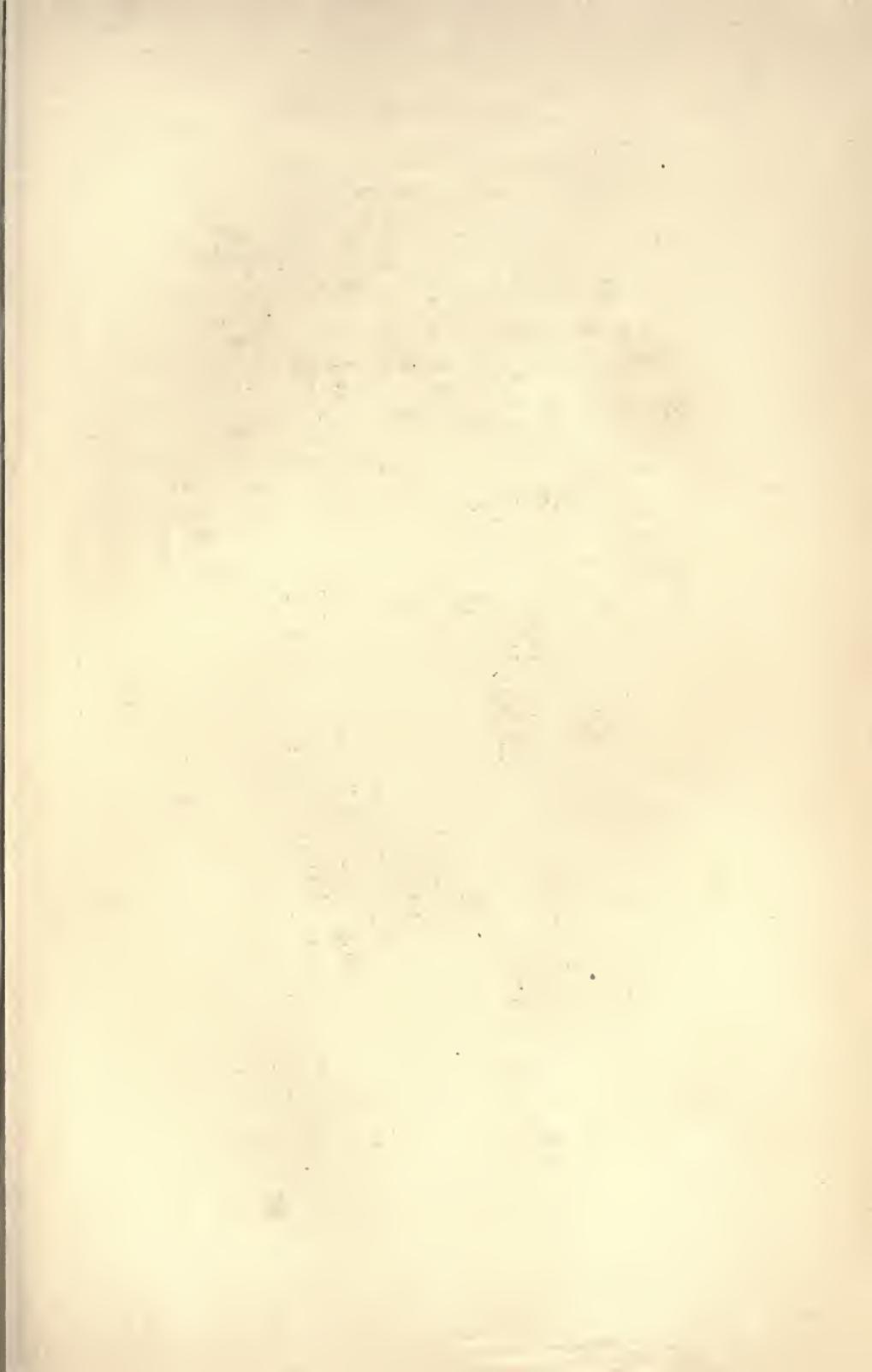
He rose and groped his way round to me, falling repeatedly in the transit.

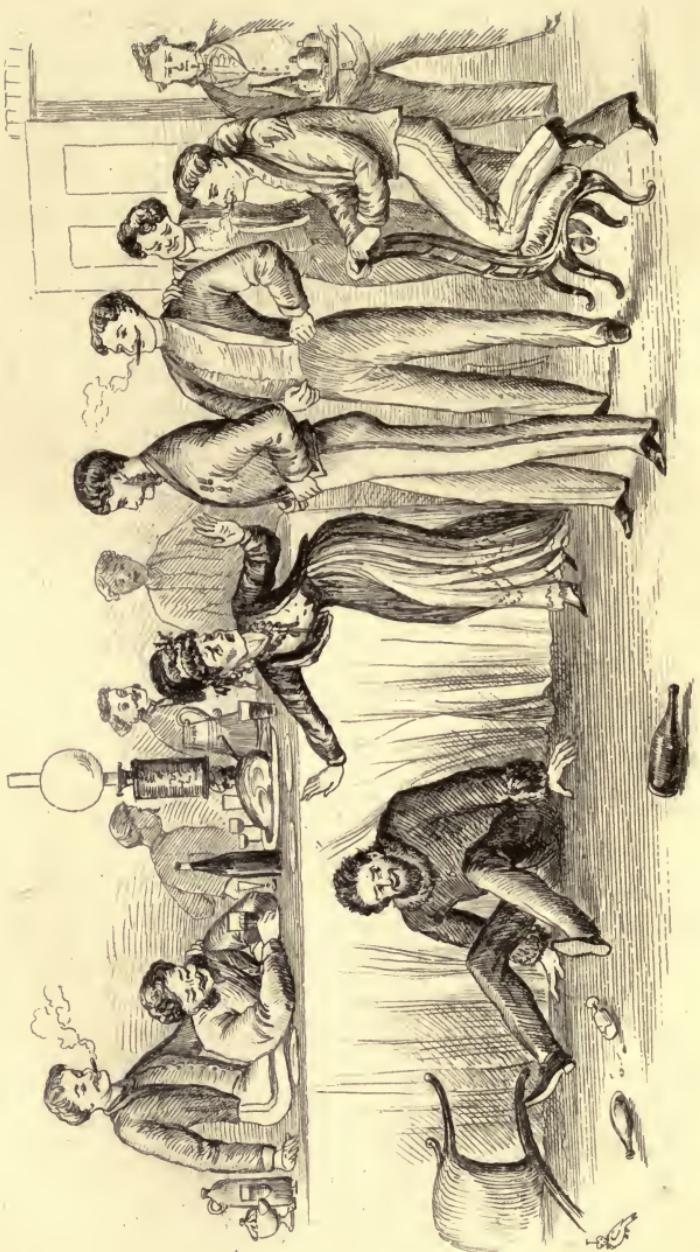
"I'm sick of the d—d business—hic—I 'ont stand it, there. I'll p-p-peach for £250; promise me £250 and not to lag me—hic—and I'll p-peach for £250—I will, by gum!"

"I promise."

"Well, then, your missus was married when you—when you married the—hic—devil out in—in—"

"Hwhare is he? Tayke me to um! Show me mee hosband!" These words, bellowed outside the door, immediately preceded the entrance of the Irresistible, who burst into the room in a state of the highest excitement. The shock tumbled Plotski off his chair, and he remained beneath the table, concealed. "Moightly noice offishers!" continued the lady, "moightly p'loite indeed, to keep a lady standin' out foreninst the door in the strayte, and thim blayguards of soldgers to say sich things to the loikes





"He's drunk jontlemen, belayre nothing he says"

of me! No admitt'nce, was it? Will, here I am,annyhow, and now, hwhare's mee hosband, Mr Impid-dence?" and she fetched Jack Leslie a whack across the cheek, which stopped his grinning. There was a very biological energy about the lady certainly. "Hwhare is he, ye varmints?" she screamed.

"Here," piped Plotski from his lair.

"Hwhare?" she cried, advancing.

"Here," rejoined Plotski, raising his white sodden face above the table—"here—drunk; and I shay, damme, I've done it! I've done with you too, you blasted witch! I've peached—I have, by gum!"

"Hwhat?" yelled the woman; then recovering herself, she raised her forefinger menacingly, fixed her horrible eye on Plotski, and ejaculated, as it were an incantation, "Cran-barra! Klimpksi khobana!"

"Cranberry yourself! Give me a gi—gi—glimpse of the cabana, and I'll sh—shmoke him," cried Plotski. "I tell you, I've done it (hic); I've sold! Three figures!—Two (hic), five, nought! that's my price—going, going, gone!" and his head came down with a bang on the table that made the glasses dance.

"He's dronck, jontlemen!" cried the Irresistible; "belayve nothing he says. Come home at wonst, Maximilian!"

"I 'ont, I tell ye. I aint a-goin' to be 'ocuspocussed about the country—'avin' eclectic fits—and gammonin' (hic), 'bout Bagdad and Leckchures—I'm done with it, I tell ye. Two—five—nought—Cap'n; come to King's 'Ed t'morrow—you'll 'av it all out."

"I'll be with you at ten," I said.

The woman looked keenly at me, and her countenance changed.

"He's been telling you nonsense, sir," she said.
"You won't trouble to come?"

"Oh! I'll come to ask for the Signor's health," I said, with a laugh, and a look intended to convey the idea, "I only say this to humour him; I won't come."

There was some difficulty in getting the Professor off the premises; but at last the barrack-gates fairly closed upon him and Madame, and fainter and fainter from away down the empty street came back their voices—sounds of fierce vituperation, mingled with the shrill tipsy laughter of the man.

CHAPTER XVI.

"If his occulted guilt
Do not itself unkennel in one speech,
It is a damned ghost that we have seen."

—*Hamlet.*

To my brother officers the scene had suggested nothing but the disgusting intoxication of Plotski, and steps, indeed, had just been about to be taken for his ejection at the moment when the woman presented herself. The conversation which the Signor had addressed to me had excited no curiosity whatever, being set down simply to the maunderings of a drunkard; so, after one or two little bits of chaff

about "getting rid of that abominable wife of mine," we separated. I had little doubt now that I had got a key—*the* key, in fact—to the Burridge mystery, which might unlock it—which *might*, if properly handled; but obviously it was a case of great nicety. The fellow might deny everything in the morning—and what then? He had been drunk—he had talked nonsense—he would remember nothing about it. Unfortunately I was *not* Burridge. Although he was satisfied of my identity, I could identify him in no way; even if I could, by what legal process could I detain him, or force him to repeat, sober, what he had stated when drunk? In his sober moments this biological woman would regain her ascendancy, and it was clearly her object to keep the secret which he had let out. That he had spoken the truth I had no doubt; the woman's anxiety showed that at once. On recalling Burridge's story I had no difficulty in identifying Plotski with the individual who had figured in it, both in London and at Calcutta, as Count Doldorouski, plotting for the rescue of Carlotta's papa, and then as Bill Whytock, the rascally brother of that infamous woman. That he was her husband I had now scarcely a doubt. But this woman—who was she? Not Carlotta, certainly. Burridge's description of her did not at all tally with the characteristics of the "magnetic lady." Who was she, then? Her interest in the business was a vital one, clearly, and a hold over her would be a most desirable acquisition; but how to get it? Here I was all abroad.

Early in the morning, to be prepared against all

contingencies, I extracted from the Major (under pressure of the most tragical representations of life-and-death business) a week's leave, and having packed a portmanteau, and mobilised myself generally, at half-past nine I presented myself at the King's Head and inquired for Signor Plotski.

"The Signor started by the nine o'clock train, sir," said the waiter.

"The devil! started for good and all? took his baggage?"

"Yes, sir, and the lady and everything."

"But he's to lecture to-night?"

"No, sir, the lady got a telegram, she said (she was out early), that called them away. But they're to be back on Monday, to give the second lecture."

"Where did they go to?"

"Can't say, sir, I'm sure; they went to the train—main line—that's all I know, from giving the cabman his orders."

Here was a checkmate. As I stood pondering, a man came up to the door and said to the waiter, "I wish to speak to Signor Plotski—I won't detain him a moment; say it's about the lighting the hall for this evening."

"But he's gone," said the waiter.

"Gone? where?" cried the man, turning white.

"Can't say, sir; he's gone, though."

"Oh the swindler! oh the scoundrel! oh the blackguard! done me out of a five-pound note as clean as a whistle."

"How's that?" asked the waiter.

"Why, I let him the room for two nights at £5

a-night, and was fool enough not to take the payment in advance."

"Oh ! if you're the gentleman that owns the hall," said the waiter, "it's all right ; he left a message for you that they're to be back to lecture on Monday, and you're to be sure to have the hall in order and send out the advertisements."

"That's a business - like swindler ! Hall ready ! advertisements out ! chuck good money after bad ! very likely—the infernal scoundrel ! "

An idea occurred to me—a brilliant one I thought—and I said, "I have a very strong reason for wishing to get hold of this fellow too ; now, suppose we can find out where he's gone, we might telegraph to the police to arrest him ; your charge is quite strong enough."

"But where has he gone ?"

"Well, we can try at the station ; they are a remarkable enough looking couple ; the booking-clerk or some of the porters may have noticed their destination."

Down we went accordingly to the station, the lessee of the hall cursing and swearing all the way. "I could have told you he was a blackguard," he said, "and not to be trusted ; but he had such a good house last night, I never dreamt of his going before he had a second haul. I can't understand it. It's just my luck."

We had no sooner described the party to the booking-clerk, than he said : "Oh ! you mean the lecturer and his wife ? Yes, I can tell you about them : they booked to London."

"Sure?"

"Certain; I noticed it, because I meant to go back to the lecture to-night."

"When is their train due in London."

"Three o'clock."

"Bravo! there's lots of time. Come, let us go to the police station. And in half an hour we had the satisfaction of knowing that, on the arrival of the Signor at King's Cross, he would find an escort waiting to conduct him to Government lodgings for the night.

I then telegraphed to Burridge at Aldershot to meet me in town—and to my agent, who had taken the case in hand some time before, to the same effect; and at twelve o'clock I was myself rattling away to London in the express train due at 4.30.

I found Burridge and the lawyer already waiting for me at the hotel. At the station I had heard of Plotski's safe arrest.

Adolphus was nearly mad with excitement. It was a quaint study to observe this plunger of elephantine stolidity prancing about the room like a maniac, tearing his hair and almost foaming at the mouth. One moment in rapture at the thought of release, shaking me by the hand, and slapping the lawyer on the back; the next full of doubt and fear, then breathing the most murderous sentiments against Plotski: "I would have killed him, Donald, if I had been you—strangled the hound on the spot. How on earth did you keep your hands off him?"

"It's a good case," said the lawyer—"it's a fairly good case; the grand piece of luck is having him in

confinement ; away from the influence of the woman, we have some chance of getting the truth out of him. I will arrange to get access to him to-morrow morning, in the police cell, on the plea of getting his evidence in an important case. And I think, I *do* think, Captain Bruce," he continued, glancing at Burridge, who was at the moment going through the motions of putting Doldorouski's head "in chancery," "if you were to continue to personate your friend, and come with me in that capacity, it would be better. Captain Burridge's excitement might destroy it all."

"How say you, Adolphus ? shall I go for you ?" said I.

"Ugh !" sobbed Dolly, throwing himself down with a sob of exhaustion after his strong pantomime. "Yes, Donald, it would be better ; I couldn't answer for myself. I'm a good-natured bird generally, but, hang it, seven years of purgatory, and served out by this fiend ! I'd be at him I suspect. You'd better go." And so it was agreed.

"Mrs Burridge is in London herself," said the lawyer.

"Oh ! hang it, man, don't call the devil by my name !"

"The alleged Mrs Burridge, I should say ; it will simplify matters. Perhaps a warrant for her arrest might be obtained."

"Well," said Dolly, "I'd rather not, if it *can* be avoided. I owe *her* no kindness, certainly, but I don't want all the newspapers to be full of me and my adventures."

"I'm afraid that can't be helped : if the man con-

fesses that he is her husband, and also his connivance at her bigamous marriage, he must be indicted of course."

"We must see what turns up at the interview with him in the morning."

Permission having been obtained to visit Plotski (who had been remanded pending the arrival of the lessee from M——) in his cell, the lawyer and I went thither about eleven o'clock next forenoon.

We found the wretch lying on a bench, looking horribly haggard and ill, apparently verging on that condition popularly known as "the horrors." He started up with an oath when we came in. "What! more troubles! more people to swear me a thief! D—n you, Burridge! it's you. I hate you—you've plagued my life out. Curse your secret, our secret, her secret. Fifty pounds a - year! ha! ha! and chained to a tiger-ess! It aint worth it; blowed if it is. I'll peach—here goes!—listen to me peaching, gents. Once on a time—there was—ha! ha! don't you wish you make get it?" and, with an insane laugh, he sat down and put his head between his hands. Presently he began to writhe and groan and cry out,

"Oh God! it burns—it burns—it's splitting—it's bursting—it's blowing up! Catch hold of me, some one—quick! save me!" and down he fell on the floor in a fit. We got the surgeon at once, who brought him round with some strong application.

"You can't possibly speak to him now, gentlemen," said the surgeon.

"It's of vital importance," said I.

"I can't help it; he's in a very critical state—he is unfit to be spoken to. I shall give him a quiescent now; towards evening you may come back, and if it is at all permissible, you shall have access to him then."

This was a terrible *contretemps*. He might not be visible that night, but he might be well enough to appear in court next day. The lessee would have arrived by that time, the case might be settled without imprisonment, and the Signor would be out of our control, and able to take himself off to Bagdad, Moscow, Aleppo, or the "Cotty - Wotty." We had really nothing tangible to go upon—nothing but his own drunken utterances.

An idea occurred to the lawyer, and in accordance with it a telegram was sent to the lessee, begging him to delay his arrival in town for another day, and promising that his interests should not suffer thereby.

On presenting ourselves at the police station in the evening, the surgeon said, after some hesitation, that we might see the man for a very short time. "He's quite quiet and rational now, but you'll find him in a very low state," he added, "and don't stay long with him."

Certainly the Signor was in a very dilapidated state. "Can't you let a poor devil alone?" he cried; "let me alone, to go off the 'ooks in peace."

"No, my good fellow," said the lawyer, quietly, "you're not going off the hooks; and if you were, it would be all the better for you to do the right thing once in your life. We shan't trouble you long. You

gave the Captain here some information the other night at M——; it was sufficient for us, but it would save trouble and expense if you would be a little more explicit. Come now, my good fellow, out with the whole story."

"Can't you let a poor devil alone, and not come a-badgerin' and a-batin' him in prison?"

"No, Whytock—not at all; we don't mean to let you alone till we've got it out of you."

"You'll get nothing out of me," he said, doggedly.

"Oh yes! we shall," cried the lawyer, fumbling, with a very high action, for a note-book in his breast-pocket, which, when produced, he affected to study. "We know more than you think, my good man—a ve—ry great deal more. It would save you trouble if you helped us to the rest—trouble, and perhaps severe punishment. Just to show you that you are in our power, I may mention that we know things about you that you would hardly like the police to know, for instance; so you'd better try to be obliging." The lawyer threw this fly as a pure speculation, but seeing that it "*rose*" Mr Whytock by the agitation of his countenance, he followed it by a second and a bolder one, which might have ruined the whole plan of attack. "Let me see," he continued, turning over the pages of the note-book as if trying to light on a date somewhere therein recorded—"let me—see; at the time you were in Cal—cutta—you—had—been married to—the woman calling herself—Carlotta Seymour—just—"

"Who told you that? who says that?" cried the fellow, in great agitation.

"Never mind, my man—you had been, as I say, married—"

"It's a lie!" screamed the man: "no one can prove it; I defy 'em to—"

"Gently, gently; perhaps you'll deny next that Carlotta had been married before; you see we've got facts, my man, and means that you don't dream of; it's no good your denying things."

"Cuss your facts; because she was married, 'taint necessary that *I* was married to her, is it? I aint a-goin' to deny anything about *her*—why should I? confound her! I've kep' her secret; but she don't pay up half: fifty pound a-year to be chained to a tiger-ess that watches every drop I drink and every word I say, and 'unts me and makes a hass of me with her spyin' and pryin', 'occussin' about in black barnacles, and callin' myself a count and a signor—fifty pound a-year don't pay for that kind of game. I don't care a blow about her—not *I*. I'll be free, I will, by gum! and I'll drink wot I please and w're I please, and say wot I think; d—n her heyes!"

"Quite right—quite right; and you married her—I mean, she married in the year—let me see—where is it?" and the lawyer scrutinised his notes again.

"Oh! she married—*I* can tell you the year and the month, too, for the matter of that. Fifty-three was the year—September was the month—Pancras was the church—and Tom Finney was the man. Tom Finney was carpenter at 'the Surrey;' she was hactin' there then. I was a pal of Tom's, I was. I was at the weddin', I was. I see them register in the vestry. Her name's Hanne Mole, but she chucked up

the Mole, and called herself Carlotta Seymour, which she registered. The Surrey people, they know the whole thing—the whole apothek. Tom Finney and she didn't square it. ‘She's a bad lot, Bill,’ says he to me one day, ‘and my name's Walker. I'll have nothink more to say to her,’ says he. ‘She's robbed our landlord,’ says he; ‘and she's a reg'lar vagabone. I turn her off,’ says he; ‘the landlord says, to give her a chance, he'll be dark about the robbery—that's his look-out; she may go to the devil for me, and I'll never see her again,’ says Tom. Well, she changed her theatre, and got on like winkin’. She's a clever one, she is; and she got on to the tune of twenty pound a-week once. I got back in the world—lost my berth at the Surrey, and was 'ard up—starvin', I was; so I thinks, ‘I've a pull over yon one along o' the robbery,’ thinks I, ‘and I'll go and look my lady up.’ So I went and saw her.

“‘Wot d'ye want, you disrep'ible-lookin' hobjick?’ says she to me, quite 'aughty.

“‘Money,’ says I, ‘and money I'll have.’

“‘Police!’ she cries.

“‘Don't 'oller,’ says I, ‘or I'll split to your manager about your robbin' old Popjoy's till.’

Down she sat, quite pale, and gev me a tenner.

“‘I'll take it in the mean time,’ says I, ‘and I'll hold my tongue purvisionally.’

“After that I was a good deal about her, getting fivers and suchlike, now and again.

“‘Here again!’ she used to cry, when I came in.

“‘Yes,’ I used to say, ‘I've come to get some glue for my tongue.’

"There was a woman (my tiger-ess), Kitty Colooney; she was a dresser, and a bit of a hactress, and a bit of a dancer, and a bit of a lot o' other things too. She was a clever one, but thirsty. She was useful to Carlotta, and when she got on in the world, went to stay with her, doing odd turns for her,—rehearsing now and again, makin' her clothes, and suchlike; her maid, she called her then, but she was her pal, too, all the same.

"I kep' company with Kitty for a bit, then, and she says to me, 'You've a pull over the missus, Bill,' says she; 'but go halves, and I think I'll be able to get a bigger screw on some day.'

"Agreed," says I, and it was so.

"Kitty had good sharp ears and good sharp eyes, and before long she comes to me and tells me that the missus is workin' up to a second marriage with a hass of a hofficer (you, my fine feller), and that here would be a screw and no mistake; and it was so. Soon after, Carlotta takes herself hoff to Ingia, 'untin' this youngster (you, you know); and Kitty persuades her to let her go out, and be 'useful to her, and better herself,' as she said; and she hadn't been away four months when Kitty writes and tells me that the game's played, the missus married, and the screw on tight and sure, and it was so.

"Kitty got a pot of money to be quiet, and behaved on the square to me at first; but *that* didn't last, and I had to go to Calcutta myself to look after her. I soon let my lady know that I hadn't come all that way for tenners and fivers, and I did get a pretty tall figure out of her.

"Then the banker turned rusty, and you came down, and I nearly split, being partially tight, you remember; and then you paid me hoff. I went 'ome then, and Carlotta promised me wot she could give in the way of tips, and fifty pound a-year.

"I was at her pretty hoften for tips, and so was Kitty, I expect; for at last she got desp'rate, and she writes to me, and she says to Kitty, 'My life's a burden along o' you two, and I'll give myself up—I will, and I swear it—unless you make a bargain with me to keep together and keep each hother quiet, and take your annuities—Kitty a 'undred, and you fifty—and hother me no more for your perquisicks, as you call 'em.'

"Well, we 'ad to make the bargin, and we've kep' together, and a fine dog's life it's been. Kitty's father 'ad been a biologist, and a mesmerist, and a conjuror, and hother things; and Kitty 'ad learned the tricks of the trade, and got 'old of a leckchure of her guv'nor's. 'We'll set up byologisin,' says she; 'it'll pay like fun, if you'll keep the muzzle on that big mouth of yours. You'll spout the leckchure in a wig and barnacles, and I'll work the hother horacle, which I can do.' And she can, for her guv'nor 'd put her up to all the devilment, and all the tricks; and so we *did* set up; but I'm sick of it, and I'm sick of 'er, and I've peached, and I'll be drunk for a year, if I like. That's the whole go. And just you get me out o' pris'n now, and 'and me over the flimsies, as per contrack—two, five, nought."

"I daresay that can be arranged," said the lawyer: "if we find you've told the truth, we'll pay the small

debt for you, and get the charge withdrawn. As to the sum you mention, I can say nothing about that till I see Captain Burridge."

"Well, use your eyes and look at 'im now, and talk away—no cer'mony with me—I aint proud, I aint."

"You mistake: this is not Captain Burridge, but his friend."

"Oh! Walker—oh! gammon—oh! you 'aven't got a nerve, I don't think. 'Cause I've got on barnacles, that aint to say there's a lot o' green in the white of my eye, is it?"

Declining to discuss this optical question, or to argue out the point of my identity, we left Mr Whytock to his prison meditations.

"What do you think of it?" said I to the lawyer, as we left the police office.

"Think of it?" said he; "I think excellently of it."

"But do you believe his story?"

"I believe there is enough of truth in it to serve our turn; and we have been singularly lucky in getting it out of him. Depend upon it, he's committed some crime;—it was my haphazard hint that we knew something against him independent of this business that made him begin to be communicative; and of course his nervous state was all in our favour."

"What are we to do next, then?"

"Next?" said the lawyer, hailing a cab—"the Surrey Theatre, of course; we must unearth this Tom Finney."

"I believe we have just left Tom Finney," said I.

"Very well, we must identify him as such. All we want to prove is that the man who married the *soi-disant* Mrs Burridge was alive at the end of '57; whether his name was Whytock, or Finney, or Plotski matters not a jot."

But, to my surprise, we found from the officials at the Surrey Theatre a confirmation of Whytock's statement, so far.

Carlotta in 1851-53 had been engaged at that theatre. In the latter year she was believed to have married one of the stage carpenters, Thomas Finney by name. They must have quarrelled and separated shortly after, however; they certainly were not living together, or even on speaking terms, at the end of the year, about which time she left the theatre, and took an engagement at the Adelphi—Finney continuing at the Surrey without intermission till '62.

I had done injustice to Signor Plotski, then, it seemed; but what had become of Mr Finney? He had changed his theatre, but the reigning carpenter knew his address; and we were *en route* again in half an hour, in quest of his lodgings.

"Nothing like striking while the iron is hot," said the lawyer, rubbing his hands. "We'll have the case completed before night."

CHAPTER XVII.

"Is this the man? Is't you, sir, that know things?"

—*Antony and Cleopatra.*

In a little street near Covent Garden, and after ascending many dingy stairs, we arrived at the abode of Mr Finney, and had the good luck to find that gentleman at home, and in the act of regaling himself solus with his evening meal. He was a short quite elderly man, of respectable appearance, sparing of his speech, and, when he did speak, monosyllabic. He had a ruminating eye occasionally flecked with a ray of fun. He was altogether devoid of the "stage business," which the dramatic outsider so often affects, and had a disinclination to commit himself about trifles that might almost have attracted notice north of the Tweed.

"Good evening, sir," said the lawyer, blandly, on entering.

"Evenin'," said Mr Finney, without rising, but staring like the sphinx, and inserting a huge wedge of soap-like cheese in his mouth.

"And a lovely evening it is," continued the lawyer, cheerily.

"Aint been hout," replied the carpenter, thickly, through his cheese.

"You're Mr Finney, I think?" said my companion.

"Hivery man 'as 'is himpressions," said Mr Finney, washing down the cheese with a mouthful of beer,

but keeping his winkless eye upon us. "Sometimes there kreck—sometimes *not* kreck."

"Quite true," smiled my friend, humouringly, "but I know you're Mr Finney."

"Why do you ask, then?"

"Only for form's sake, my dear sir."

"Oh!" and he went on munching and staring, like a cow chewing the cud.

"Mr Thomas Finney, I may say," continued the lawyer.

"Oh! you know that too, do you?"

"Oh yes! my dear sir, I know that too."

"Then you don't want to ask me the question, I expect?"

"No; but I know more about you than you think, Mr Finney."

"P'raps you're a hextra clever man?"

"I hope so; it's my business to be clever."

"P'raps you know more nor there is to know?"

"Oh no, no!" laughed the lawyer, as though much tickled with Mr Finney's humour; "but I assure you we know nothing that isn't to your credit."

"Don't you, now?"

"No, indeed, we don't. You've had your misfortunes, of course."

"Of coarse, of coarse."

"But you've got over them all."

"There's no more a-comin', then, I s'pose?"

"My dear sir, let us be serious; I am here as a lawyer."

"That's one misfortin I aint got over, then."

"Ah! Mr Finney, I see you're an incorrigible joker

like all you dramatic gentlemen. Will you answer an honest man a plain question, joking apart, now?"

Finney took a pull at his beer, and replied, "'Oos a-jokin'? I aint, nor this 'ere gent, as I knows on, and I'm not aweer as you've said nuffink hextray comic. I aint larfed, as I knows on. 'Oos a-jokin'?"

"Will you answer a question, then?"

"I aint on my hoath, I s'pose?"

"Certainly not; it's a private question—all among friends. I only want to see if you can tell me something I know all about already," said the lawyer, rather out-diplomatising himself.

"Ah! I see—it's a k'nundrum; but I give it up—never could make nuffink of them."

The lawyer looked at me in despair.

"I think you had better ask the question straightforwardly," I said; "there is no reason why Mr Finney should object to answer it."

Mr Finney looked perfectly wooden and placid, and browsed away at his bread and cheese.

"Well, then, straightforwardly, Mr Finney, are you a married man?"

"Well, then, straykeforwigly, I can't tell you."

"That's odd; were you ever married?"

"Yes, I was."

"A widower, perhaps?"

"Mayhap."

"You don't know?"

"I don't know, and I don't bruise my hoats, and I aint a-goin' to Rosherville, and I don't know who's Griffiths, and, wot's more, I don't care; and now, please to tell me wot all this 'ere lark is? Wot are

you comin' a-nigglin' and a-nagglin' at me for, and disturbin' me at my wittles? 'Oo are you, you white-faced cuss?" The manner was as calm as ever, though the words were strong. "I aint a-goin' to sit hargle-barglin' with you all night; my time's hup—it is. 'Oo are you?"—and he rose.

"My good sir, in the cause of law and justice and humanity, answer me a question. I'm a lawyer—Mr Wilkin, of Saville Row. I'm employed in a matrimonial cause. A person is suspected of having committed bigamy; I believe the proof lies with you. Were you married in 1853 to a woman known by the name of Carlotta Seymour?"

The man's face blazed into sudden animation. "Married to her? Yes, I was married to her, the thief! the villain!" and he went on to apply to his spouse a string of epithets of more force than refinement. "And she's committed biggermee, has she? 'Taint a 'angin' bus'ness, I believe—more's the pity. I'd go a 'undred mile on a donkey to see her 'ung."

"No, it's not a hanging business; but you were married to her, and could identify her, could you?"

"Couldn't I, and wouldn't I? But wot will you do to her?—something hextra salt, eh?"

"Oh yes! of course; but our main object, in the first place, is to free a gentleman from his marriage with her; and, by the by, this will enable you to get a divorce, and marry again. You must marry an heiress this time, Mr Finney, eh? Ha! ha!"

"Thankin' you graciously, Tom Finney's billycock covers T. F.'s family and k'neckshuns for the few-chure."

"Could you come and assist us to identify her to-morrow?"

"Come? Slippy. I'm your man, hanny time and hannyware."

"To-morrow at twelve. Will you come to the Grosvenor Hotel?"

"See if I don't. But why'n thunder, Mr Lawyer, coodn't you hout with this at fust, instead of hagittatin' a feller at his wittles? I thought you was a depitation from John Bright or the People's William to get me to make a speech in the Squeer. But I'll come; see if I don't."

"Eureka!" cried the lawyer, as we left Mr Finney's door—"eureka! the case is virtually complete, and Captain Burridge is a free man. The identification is a certainty, of course, and I only go on with it to satisfy Captain Burridge's mind, and enable him to make his arrangements in advance of the legal formalities that may be necessary. I shall be at the hotel before noon to-morrow, and will bring the lady's address. Then we can go and visit her in a body, and give her an opportunity of comparing the merits of her two husbands—ha! ha!"

"Adolphus, my boy, you're free!" I said, on entering the room, where I found my friend, now fairly done up with anxiety and excitement, lying prostrate on a sofa. He stared at me in a confused way, as if he had been sleeping.

"What d'ye mean? You've not really found the husband?"

"Really found him."

"And he admits the marriage?"

"Of course he does, and will go with us to-morrow and identify the woman ; you're free ! "

Burridge rose slowly. "Donald," he gasped, "I — bless you — you're my good ang—— Holloa ! what's this ? It's dark — I'm choking ;" and down he fell with a bang on the floor, senseless and motionless, in a dead faint.

Now, here was a fellow I had once looked upon as a mere "*natus-consumere-fruges*,"—incapable of emotion, good - natured from laziness, born *blaze*, "*né fatigué*"—here was this large physical man conducting himself in the most appropriately sensational way, disclosing nerves, feelings, affections, and a power of becoming unconscious at the fitting crisis, that would have delighted a dramatic artist. I had, indeed, fathomed Adolphus before, but this last, this fainting phase, brought painfully to my mind the sufferings the simple patient fellow had undergone, not unmingled with a thrill of admiration for the manly Anglo-Saxon nature disdaining to hoist a flag of distress to the world, and only betraying, when relief arrived, how stern had been the ordeal passed through.

He soon came to himself. "I say, Donald, what the deuce do you go knocking a fellow about for ?" was his first question on opening his eyes. "A joke's a joke, but eh ? Why ? Oh yes ! I remember now—ah !——" and with a long gasp of relief he closed his eyes and lay back again. I did not disturb him.

It was a happy evening for both of us, though little was said on either side.

Adolphus sat plunged in meditation, but every now and then a ray of joy like a sunbeam flashed across his face, and he would rise and grasp my hand, and "God-bless" me, "not so much for my own sake, old fellow," he would say—"not so much for myself as for her. A man is stronger—he goes about the world, and has distractions; but a woman—what has a woman got to do but brood over her troubles? Poor Mary! what lines she's had! God bless you, Donald, for her!"

It was in vain to disclaim personal merit, and point out that I was little more than an accidental instrument.

"Well, Adolphus," I said, "this likeness of ours has, I hope, been the means of bringing about your happiness, and you shall thank me as much as ever you like—that is, thank the likeness, provided it continues to be a good angel, and carries out in my case the good work it has begun; for if it hadn't been for you and it, you know, I should never have met Lady Rose, probably."

"Carry it out, old boy! Of course it will carry it out."

"Ah! I'm not sure of that; I have nothing positive to go on. Lady Rose may have forgotten all about me by this time."

"Forgotten all about you! as if any one could forget the best fellow who ever walked on the earth! Never! I'll stake my life on your being accepted. If you weren't, I'd follow her about the world and give her no rest. I'd haunt her like a shadow—like somebody's ghost—always saying, 'Be mine! Be

mine !'—only I'd say, 'Be his, be his !' of course, you know ;" and with a hearty laugh at this novel specific for securing the affections of a young lady, we separated for the night in high spirits.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Such then," said Una, "as she seemeth here,
Such is the face of Falsehood ; such the sight
Of fowle Duessa, when her borrowed light
Is laid away, and counterfesaunce knowne."

—SPENSER : *Faerie Queene*.

The lawyer was with us next day at noon punctually.

"Wish you joy, Captain Burridge," he exclaimed, "with all my heart, I'm sure ; the case is complete, and the identification merely formal, for your own satisfaction ; and it will depend upon yourself whether criminal proceedings are to be instituted against the lady or not."

"Oh ! hang the proceedings ! I don't want a row ; let me be quit of her, that's all."

"That you shall be, my dear sir—that you shall be. You must nerve yourself for the unpleasantness of confronting her now, however. It will be painful, but, like tooth-drawing, it will soon be over. You will be able to command your feelings, I do trust ?"

Burridge, with the morning light, had arrayed himself anew in the profound stolidity of the heavy

dragoon, and he answered the attorney with ox-like wonder in his eye. "Painful? it's the jolliest thing I've had to do for seven years, I can tell you."

"Delighted to hear you take that view of it, my dear sir; it will be well that I accompany you, I suppose?"

"Oh! certainly, certainly; and here comes Mr Finney, I suppose," as a knock came to the door.

"A party for Captain Bruce," said the waiter, throwing open the door, and in walked Mr Finney.

"Mornin', gents hall," said he, entering slowly, and bearing far in front of him, as if to protect them from collisions, a weather-beaten chimney-pot hat of colossal dimensions, and a green cotton umbrella in complete harmony with it. "A little arter time I am, but I 'ad to spiff myself hup a bit arter the shop, along o' goin' into lady's s'ciety, you see."

"Plenty of time, Mr Finney, plenty of time; won't you sit down?" said the lawyer. And after a good deal of manœuvring with his hat and umbrella, Mr Finney brigaded them together in a strongly - intrenched position under his chair, and then coolly surveyed the company with a twinkling eye.

"Wich is 'im?" he said, at last. "One on 'em's 'im, in coarse, but wich is t'other? Wich on 'em kem to my shop last night? Blarmed if I iver see sich a pair o' Corksican Brothers. My guv'nor 'd give 'em an 'atfull; see if he didn't."

"This is Captain Bruce, who visited you last night," said the lawyer; "and this is Captain Burridge, whom you're going to make a free man of, Mr Finney."

"My sarvice to you, sir," said Mr Finney, nodding

to Adolphus with a comical expression. “ ‘Ow’s our old ‘ooman ?’ ”

“ What do you mean ? ” said Burridge.

“ ‘Ow’s our wife ? We’re a joink-stock company, aint we ? Finney & Co. ? ‘Ow’s our missus, Co. ? There aint another pardner in the consarn, is there ? ”

“ No, I don’t think so,” said Burridge, stolidly ; “ but I haven’t seen Mrs Finney for six years.”

“ Oh ! you split too, did you ? Now, if I may ax the freedom, wot was it ? ”

“ What ? ”

“ Wot was the split on ? ”

“ Oh ! hundreds of causes, Mr Finney.”

“ Ah ! she wor a one, warn’t she, now ? She wor a one to worrit the ‘ind leg hoff a jackass, and, ‘scewsin’ freedom, she found two on ‘em ; didn’t she now, Co. ? ”

“ That she did, Mr Finney.”

“ She lived ‘igh, she did,” said the carpenter, surrendering himself to a train of conjugal reminiscences. “ She worn’t a cheap bargain, no ‘ow ; and livin’ ‘igh gave ‘er a nigh temper ; and the swearink of her !—horffle ! and the lyin’ thief she wor ! owdaycious, surey-lie ! She wos the Princiss Pofflepowski in her hown right ; but in disguide, warn’t she ? I ‘unted up the Hemp’ror, her father. He ‘ad a fancy for cobblin’ and livin’ in Shoreditch, and puttin’ a sign hover his palass door—‘ Peter Mole, Boots and Shoes.’ Ah ! she wor a kweer one, and no mistake ! ” And Mr Finney indulged in a saturnine laugh.

“ Jest afore we wor married,” he went on—“ blowed if it don’t bust me still—she says to me, ‘ Thomas,’ says she in her ‘igh way, ‘ You must ‘old up your

'ead after we're married.' 'So I will,' says I; 'I allus did.' 'You must 'old it 'igher than iver now, then,' says she; 'do you know wot you're a-goin' to be, Thomas?' 'Third carpinter at the Surrey,' says I; 'and fust chop by-and-by, please the pigs,' says I. 'Gnoble thought!' says she, throwin' hout her arm; 'in my country, when a princess marries a pessink, the pessink becomes a prince. You're a-goin' to be a prince, my Thomas,' says she. 'In disgudge, though?' says I. 'In disgudge for the presint,' says she. 'Then they won't go a-prayin' for me with the rest of the royal family, belike?' says I. 'Not for the presint,' says she; 'but by-and-by you'll get that, and hall other emolymints.' Oh Lor! 'ow she did carry on—surey-lie?" And Mr Finney punctuated his reflection with a little laugh.

"I wor an 'angin' horff and hon a bit, you see," he explained; "and she thought she'd nail me up and screw me down by makin' me a prince! and arter hall, I was hass enough to marry her; but so were you, Co., my boy—so there's two on us, any'ow. 'Scews my freedom, gents hall."

"By Jove!" said Burridge, "that little game about the Princess is Carlotta all over—that identifies her; but if we are going to see her, hadn't we better start and get it over?"

It was agreed to, and we started in a couple of hansoms for Gerard Street, Soho, where the "joink-stock" wife was now living. Burridge and the lawyer went in one cab, and Mr Finney and I in the second.

"Oh Lor!" remarked that gentleman, as he settled

in his seat, after breaking his nut-brown hat against the roof,—“Oh Lor! to think of me a-ridin’ in a nandsom with a tip-topper in a tagglioni and a higlass —oh Lor!” We pulled up at the corner of the street. Now was the tug of war.

“We’d better all go into the house,” said the lawyer; “but Mr Finney can remain outside the room till he’s wanted. Tell Mrs Burridge,” he said to the servant who opened the door, “that the solicitor would like to see her for a few minutes, if she’s disengaged.” Permission being given, we ascended, and Adolphus entered the room first. There was a cry of astonishment, and as I followed him in, a large, flabby, middle-aged woman, with a fishy eye, hanging white jowlers, and a towzy head of withered-looking hair, was crossing the room in stage-strides, with extended arms.

“Oh, my long lost one!” she exclaimed, stopping, however, in her march, when she saw me. “Oh, mee husband of mee youth! The quality of mercy is not strained, it drop-pop-pop” (she began to sob) “popeth as the gee-entle dee-ew! It blesseth him that gives! It shall bless me! I forgive you, mee erring one! mee perr-rodigal! To your place! to your home, in mee arms! mee Adol-ol-olphus, come!”

This scene was quite too overpowering. I bit my tongue and pinched my arm—hurt myself seriously, in fact, to suppress the bursting laughter. As for Dolly, his sense of humour was not quickly touched; besides, it was different for him, and he looked phlegmatically at the woman, and quietly remarked, “Certainly not; sit down, please. I have some business to talk about; this is my solicitor.”

"You do not come, then, to sue for mer-r-rey, for par-rdon for this long ke-reuel desertion?"

"Not at all, and, what's more, you know I haven't; so please to leave off stage-tricks till we're gone."

"Unmanly miscreant! I will not deign" (with an imperial sweep of the arm) "to hold commune with you; to the door, sir! and you, too, myrmidons!" (to the solicitor and me) "begone!"

"We'll go immediately, ma'am; we just want you quietly to acknowledge your marriage, to save trouble," said the lawyer.

"How can I deny it? His kerramping fetters are about mee harrt; and now, begone!"

"I mean your previous marriage," said the lawyer, quietly.

The woman's eyes dilated; she clutched the table, gave a quick short gasp, and her suety complexion faded (if the word is admissible) into an ashen hue. She recovered her self-possession almost instantly, however, and cried out,—

"Ah! ha! a plot to rob me of my pittance; in sooth, 'tis worthy of him."

"My good madam," said the lawyer, "this is really quite useless. We know you were married in the year 1853. Better to acknowledge it to us privately than go to a court about it with—with certain painful results."

"If you will tear the gnawing secret from my breast—my outraged breast—so be it. A foul *mesalliance* I did contract, in pique, in very madness, woman-like, to spite a slighting noble—I *did* mate me with a clown."

"That was in '53?" said the lawyer, his cool dry voice contrasting strangely with the tragic rhythm of her sentences.

"In '53 it was, but '54 brought healing on its wings. The monster died, and left me free once more," and she buried her face in her hands.

"You're sure he died?"

"Ay, very sure," she gurgled between her hands.

"His name was Finney, I believe?"

"Spare me; suffice it that the monster's dead."

The lawyer quietly opened the door and admitted the carpenter, Carlotta's face continuing buried in her hands. Finney's mouth was distended into a wide grin.

"His name was Thomas Finney, carpenter at the Surrey Theatre, I think?" repeated the lawyer.

"Ask me no more," hissed the woman; "suffice it that the carpenter is dead!"

"The carpenter 'as overlooked the succ'mstance if he is," said Finney in a hollow voice.

The woman dropped her hands, and a real shriek of anguish and fear rang through the house.

"An apparition!" she gasped, sitting down and holding her hands to her side—"a ghost! he must be dead! I swear I thought him dead!" and she rocked herself to and fro. "It's a cheat, a trick, a lie; it's not the man," she went on, wildly. "Who says it's the man? who dares to say it's he? he died in '54."

"Well, he must 'ave dug 'issel up agin, old 'ooman—that's all. You recleck you kem to 'is shop in '55, and got a fippun note from him, which it aint costumyary to get from any ghosts I've heerd tell on; and the

nex time you kem—a year arter—you wos tight, you recleck, and he turned you hout and called a peeler; so he wor above ground then, and he's not been a-dyin' much lately, as he's aweere on, and, wot's more, don't mean to."

"Is that your wife, Mr Finney?" said the lawyer.

"That's the 'ooman I took for my wife in '53—worse luck. Lor! but she's haltered since then. More like a hox than a hangel now, surey-lie!"

"I think it's cruel to prolong this scene," said I; "we're all satisfied—let us go."

Carlotta looked up, with ghastly despair in her face, and said to Burridge,—

"You will go and rejoice over the downfall of a miserable woman, I suppose, and set the law on to her, and starve and imprison her. You suppose that she has no feelings, and that if she committed this breach of the law she wasn't driven to it by a foolish mad passion for you—weak dotard that she was. You will have no pity, I suppose; weak men, when they have an accidental triumph, are vindictive. It flatters them—it makes them feel strong to trample down somebody—and to trample down the fallen is their only chance."

"Hush!" replied Adolphus,—"these fine words are entirely thrown away upon me. I won't trample on you, but I won't pity you. You never loved me; you had a mad passion for my money, that was all. I may be weak, but not weak enough not to know that. As for the law, as far as I am concerned, it shan't be let loose on you. You are free to go where you please, but I advise you to leave this country, as the

law may find you out without my assistance. If you were starving, I *might* pity you ; but as I don't wish to pity you, you shall have enough to keep you from starving—but only from starving. That's all."

"I say, guv'nor, aint you goin' to lag her for bigger-mee ?" said Mr Finney, in accents of deep disappointment.

"No, no, no," said the lawyer ; "come away, come away."

"Oh Lor ! oh Lor ! to think of an 'ole blessed day lost for nuffink ! It aint friendly of you, Co. ; 'taint, now, old man."

Disregarding Mr Finney's pathetic remonstrances, we left the miserable woman to herself.

"I congratulate you again, Captain Burridge," cried the lawyer, "and all the more, now that I have seen the fate from which you have been rescued. You need now give yourself no further trouble about the matter ; I will take an opinion as to the most proper legal steps to be adopted, and will arrange everything, if possible, without troubling you again. I understand—pardon me—ahem !—I understand that certain ulterior arrangements were depending on this most fortunate discovery ; well, *the event* should be delayed till you hear from me, but, in the mean time, all arrangements can be proceeded with. It will be a matter of a few weeks at the utmost, and perhaps no delay may be necessary. Of that I will inform you by letter, however, without loss of time. And I suppose I had better arrange to have Whytock released from the police-office ?"

"Certainly, if you can manage it."

"No difficulty about that; and as to the sum of money promised him by Captain Bruce?"

"Whatever was promised he must get, of course; for, no matter how, he has been of the utmost service, and has earned the money according to the contract. Good-bye."

"Adoo, Cap'n," said Mr Finney; "the pardnership's broke hup. Finney & Co.'s took down the sign, and if there's to be no laggin', my name's Walker. 'Taint the right thing, though, no 'ow; she'll be at it agin. I'll 'ave 'arf-a-dozen new pardners. Better say 'lag,' Cap'n!"

"I don't think she's likely to find any new victims now, Mr Finney," said Adolphus; "I think we may safely let her alone. But you've lost a day's work for me, and you've done me a great service, and I should like to make you an acknowledgment: what can I do for you?"

"Nothink at all, sir; nothink at all. But if ever your watchword 'appens to be 'lag,' T. F. is the carpenter to nail the business for you. Mornin', gents hall," and Mr Finney stalked gravely down the street.

"Now, my dear Donald," said Adolphus when we were alone,—"now that the curtain's dropped on villainy and misery, and all the rest of it, now for happiness. 'Strike while the iron is hot,' as the lawyer said. You've still got four days' leave; come along to Aldershot, and steer me and yourself to victory."

"Ah! to victory! but is it to be victory for me? Happy events are rare enough in the world, but happy coincidences, how often do they happen?"

"What an old croaker you are!—the moment I begin to be jolly, you damp it by tumbling into the blues. You talk like an ass, Donald; you talk as if the whole affair was a matter of chance, like each of us winning a fortune at roulette on the same day. From what you told me, Lady Rose as good as promised; and, between you and me, you ought to have settled it on the spot. If she meant to take you, she would have done it then as much as now; why didn't you speak out like a man?"

"Mrs Badger came just as I was going to say—to say what I really think I *was* going to say."

"Why didn't you say it before Mrs Badger came, then? I've often heard it said that you clever fellows don't get on half so well with women as we thick-heads do. Upon my word, I believe it's true; and I suspect it's because you crane at your fences, and want to take them artistically, turning back and back for a new take off, instead of cramming in the spurs and going slap at them, no matter where, never mind how, so long as you get over. You treat them—women, I mean—like muses, or goddesses, or sylphs, or something, and won't speak to them like human beings. Hang it all! they *are* human beings, you know. But courage! Lady Rose—I'll answer for her."

"Varium et mutabile semper—"

"Oh! bother the dead languages! keep your spirits up, and don't let us spend the night talking metaphysics in Soho. Come on."

CHAPTER XIX.

“ Ah ! one rose,
One rose, but one by those fair fingers culled,
Were worth a hundred kisses pressed on lips
Less exquisite than thine.”

—TENNYSON.

We spent that evening together in the room in the Barracks at Aldershot, where Burridge and I had, some three months before, first formed our momentous acquaintance. “ What an age it seemed ! ” was the idea that occurred to both of us. “ And to think,” said Dolly, “ that we should have only known each other three months ! Wonderful, isn’t it ? considering that, I’ll be bound, there are no two fellows such pals in ‘ camp or anywhere.’ ”

“ Human life is properly to be measured by a reference to the number and intensity of our emotions, rather than by any arithmetical computation of days and years,” said I, sententiously.

“ Now that’s the kind of thing—I’ll be bound that’s exactly the kind of aggravating thing—you go saying to Lady Rose. Why, my dear fellow, it’s enough to frighten the Pope. Please stow away all that sort of nonsense in your portmanteau till after to-morrow, or woe betide you. And, talking of to-morrow, Donald, what is our scheme—our plan of attack ? ”

“ Well, there are two or three things to be taken into consideration. The ladies are both at the Hermitage, you’re certain ? ”

"Quite."

"It won't do to take Miss Richmond too much by surprise, you see. She must be prepared for it gently."

"Ah! who's to do it?"

"I was thinking of a little plan; if you approve of it, I think it would suit all parties concerned very well. It is, that we should both go over to F—— in the morning, but that you should wait at the hotel, while I go to the house, see Lady Rose, tell her all about it, and consult with her as to the best means of breaking the news to her cousin; and then, when the fitting moment arrives, we shall send for you, and introduce the hero on to the stage."

"Ah! I see, master Donald; you're a sly hand. You're going to take our little affairs as a text, and preach your own sermon on it, with a practical application; but, with all my heart, provided the sermon isn't too long, and you don't keep me waiting an age outside paradise. Success to the sermon, old boy, and I'm sure it will be successful."

When we separated for the night, I perceived that my feelings closely resembled those of another night when I believed myself to be approaching the crisis of my fate. I perceived that I was going to be troublesome, so I shook myself together, and said, "No good tormenting yourself—hopes or fears will be certainties to-morrow, for to-morrow the die shall be cast;" and, so saying, I tumbled into bed, grateful for an overpowering fatigue which I felt sure would bring immediate sleep and escape from thought. And sleep did come, but it came wild and feverish, as on

the memorable night after my introduction to Lady Rose.

Vivid images and visions, suggested by a medley of hopes and fears, and coloured by the strange events of the last three days, chased each other about my brain, interchanging and blending with a marvellous rapidity.

Now there was a vision of a fair face smiling gently upon me—a vision of a fair hand offering me a promised guerdon—a vision of a fair form clasped—and I felt a beating heart that required no other voice to give its happy verdict. Anon the same fair face, bright with mischievous mirth, and a musical voice that rang out elfin laughter, and cried “Too late; the chance was thine, but now ‘tis mine—the roses all are dead.” Through the livelong night this infernal jingle held possession of my fevered brain. Now and then I woke up, and, as if to exorcise the demon suggesting the evil refrain, roared out, “To-morrow the die shall be cast.” In vain—back it came, spoken now by Burridge, now by Badger, now by Lady Rose. It was set to music at last, and Tom Finney and Bill Whytock sung it over a pot-house table, to the air of the “Guards’ Waltz,” clinking their glasses and waving long white clay pipes to the time, while the irresistible Kartoffel of Bagdad danced strenuously in the midst,—

“With a hip, hip, hip, hurrah!
With a hip, hip, hip, hurrah!
They’re dead, they’re dead,
They’re dey—dey—dead,
The Roses all are dead !”

At last I woke up to find my friend standing by my bedside.

"What are you holloaing at?" he inquired. "Who's dead?"

"They are—the Roses—all of them!" I replied, dimly, "Oh! hang it! I forgot. I must have been dreaming—such abominable dreams, too. Is it time to get up?"

"Up you get. It's eight o'clock. You look as if you'd been dissipating; jump into your bath—sharp. Remember what's before us. It's a glorious morning."

It was indeed a glorious morning, and if bright skies are happy omens, better omen I could not wish. Thinking on this wise, I could not help murmuring, as we rode along on our way to F——

"Go not, happy day,
From the shining fields;
Go not, happy day,
Till the maiden yields.

When the happy yes
Falters from her lips,
Pass, and blush the news
O'er the blowing ships,

Till the Red man dance ——"

Adolphus, up to this point, had regarded me with mute disapprobation, but here he broke in,—

"Oh Donald! for heaven's sake stop! if that's the key you're in, it's all up; lay all that sort of thing aside, and put the spurs in, or I know one Red man who won't dance to-night."



"She was looking glorious"

"Don't be afraid, old boy; I'll be prudent, and, as you say, 'put the spurs in.' I suppose you've never been along this road before, Adolphus?"

"To tell you the truth, then, I have. I didn't go as long as you were here; I didn't think it right. But after you were away, I could not stand the kind of feeling of being cut off from her altogether—you were a kind of link, you know—so I rode over one evening and put up my horse, and cruised about till I found the Hermitage, and since that I've been over there every evening. I've been leading an owl's life; my life hasn't begun till twilight for the last month. I know all the windows, and all the family moves. Sometimes I was in luck, and saw Mary before the drawing-room blinds were down; sometimes it was only her shadow I saw, but that was always something. Sometimes a thing that looked like a big cauliflower, from its shadow, used to be in the window all the evening, nodding and wagging itself up and down. I found out at last that it was Mrs Badger's head, asleep; and how I used to grind my teeth when I saw it was going to be a cauliflower night! Once, and only once, the two girls came out in the moonlight, and walked on the grass in front. I was screwed in between a tree and the wall, and could see them safely. She was looking glorious."

"Which of them?" I cried, eagerly.

"Which of them? ha! ha! ha!—I like that. Well, both of them, of course, but I had only eyes for one, and I saw she had on the locket—saw it with my own eyes. That was a great night for me. One night they left the drawing-room window open.

There was music first and then talking, and I thought I would like to hear her voice, so I got on the wall and crept close up to the house, and was hearing her splendidly, when somehow I slipped and fell off into a bush with an awful crash. Luckily I was hurt, and lay still, for, in a moment after, an old fellow put his head out and holloaed, ‘Who was there?’ and ‘That he was going to fire,’ and ‘That he saw me perfectly well, and I had better give myself up, before he drilled a hole in me.’ I deuced near *did* give myself up, but I didn’t; and the old fellow, who hadn’t seen me a bit, got tired by degrees, and went away. I got a fright, but I had heard her voice; and that was my best night, I think.”

“This is the first view we get of the place,” said I, drawing rein, as we reached the top of the long hill. “There it is!” and I recognised with a thrill of blissful recollections the dark wood that encompassed the town.

The roses of the early summer had faded from the hedgerow—the roses that, for me, had lifted up their voices and spoken; but fresher than ever was their revelation now. And “there is a Rose,” thought I, “that blooms all the year round; courage, she shall be mine!” “Come on, Adolphus, quicker, and let us get rid of suspense.”

We galloped along the turf till we reached the outskirts of the town, and I then said, “Ride on now, Adolphus, and go quickly past the house; I’ll come or send for you when you’re wanted.”

“Good luck! good speed! and don’t keep me long waiting, for I’m an impatient beggar,” he replied, and clattered away up the street.

I gave him a short start, and then, literally following his often-repeated advice, I "put the spurs in," and in a couple of minutes stood, with a ringing in my ears and a thumping of the heart, in front of the door—*the* door—waiting with a wild inconsistent sort of hope that, when the servant opened it, he would say, "Not at home."

Not so, however; the man welcomed me with a broad grin, widened, doubtless, by the memory of frequent largesses, and a "lively sense of benefits to come."

He informed me that his master was gone to town as usual, that Mrs Badger was "out in the pony-carriage," but that the young ladies were, he believed, within—would I walk up? I would and did—and marched into the drawing-room in a state of numb desperation.

It was empty. "I'll go and see for the ladies," said the man.

In a couple of minutes, which seemed as many hours—and during which I had mastered, with intense avidity, a fact from '*The Times*' that Foster's "Mountain Port" was the only possible stimulant a sane man should think of imbibing—the man returned.

"Miss Mary has gone for a walk, sir," he said; "but her ladyship" (I thought the villain's eyes twinkled) "is in the garden; will you please to go there, or shall I let her ladyship know you're here, sir?"

"Oh! I'll go to the garden, certainly," said I; and I rather flattered myself my tone was careless and

jaunty. Here was the very opportunity required. It was beautiful. It was something like luck. There was a symmetry in it, a—— And yet I found myself taking the most circuitous route to the garden, slinking behind trees, and, in fact, conducting myself more like a footpad than an ardent lover hastening to pay his *devoirs*. Confound it ! Why hadn't I Burridge's facility, who proposed when he didn't want to propose—when he had no right to propose ?

The garden, however, was inexorably but two acres in extent, so unless I went away altogether, or got up a tree, I must clearly fall in with Lady Rose before long. "Forward, craven!" I muttered to myself, and started off slowly and warily down a path which, leading to the hotbeds and the depot of garden *débris*, was least of all likely to lead me to the fair object of my mission.

The stern reader will perhaps say, "What an ass!" Well, it is easy to say "ass;" but wait till you've tried it yourself, and if you have, and still say "ass," all I can say is, you must either be a heavy dragoon, or admit that the same epithet was once applicable to yourself.

Be all this as it may, I had only gone a few yards down the path, when——

"Captain Bruce ! it *is* Captain Bruce !" cried a musical voice, which, however, seemed to set a thousand wild bells jangling in my head. I started and turned, and there, a little off the path, beside a plot of standard roses, in the act of tending them, stood their patron saint—beautiful as some poet's dream of the Golden Age—the Lady Rose herself.

"This is indeed a surprise!" she said, advancing, and shaking hands with me; "and where *have* you dropped from?"

"From Aldershot," I replied, feeling stunned and stupid; "for a few days."

"Oh! my uncle never told us you were coming for a visit; he has been keeping it for a surprise, I suppose."

"I beg your pardon, I have not come for a visit, I'm sorry to say."

"I thought you said you had come for a few days."

"To Aldershot, I meant."

"Oh! well, it is very kind of you to come over to see us; I'm afraid my aunt is out, but if you can stay for luncheon I think you will see her; she will be back, I think. My uncle is in London, of course; he will be very sorry to have missed you."

A sort of chill fell upon me at these words—at this suggestion of its being possible for *me* to be at Aldershot *without* coming over to see *her*—of its being possible for me *not* to stay for luncheon—of its being possible for me *not* to see her uncle; there was a matter-of-factness about it that damped me—almost piqued me—I who had pictured myself as being there without intermission, from morn to dewy eve for the next three days.

"I hope your uncle and aunt are very well?" I said, in a damped voice.

"Very well, thanks."

"And your cousin?"

"Extremely so; better than she has been all this summer, I'm happy to say, and in great spirits at the

prospect of her trip to Ireland. Papa arrives to-night, you must know, to take us both back with him the day after to-morrow."

"Oh!" thought I, "it's all up, then. *She* is perfectly happy, that is clear, and her cousin has got over the Burridge-disappointment. I might as well have stayed away. Burridge and I are both done for—both of us."

"And you are glad to go back to Ireland, Lady Rose?" I said, in a hollow voice.

"Glad? of course I am; I am *very* fond of my uncle and aunt—very; but I confess I was getting just a little tired of this place. Then, you know, I have domestic affections, and a great many brothers and sisters to exercise them on, and all my friends are on the other side of the Channel; and I'm patriotic and fond of the Green Isle, particularly at this time of year, when the gay season is going to begin; and—and I don't like stagnation, and one does begin to feel a little like a vegetable, after three or four months of an English village; so, altogether, I am quite pleased, as you may imagine."

Her airy volubility and gay manner completely crushed me.

"How is dear Captain Crosstree?" she went on.

"D—n dear Captain Crosstree," I thought,—commanding myself, however, to reply that the pony's health was good.

"Have you many nice rides near—near—where you are now?"

She didn't even know where I was quartered, then! Oh miserable fool that I had been!

"No," I replied, almost savagely, "there is nothing nice there. I loathe it—it's worse even than Aldershot!"

She started, and looked at me quickly, changing colour; she saw something was wrong, I suppose, and said gently, "I didn't know you disliked Aldershot so much."

Now was my chance—now, now, now: but no, I was dashed—I had no spring left in me—no rally (call me an ass, now, if you like)—and only answered coldly, "Aldershot is not generally liked in the army, you know."

"So I believe."

Then we were both silent, and walked on round the garden; on—on.

The dismal silence continued. Lady Rose began to look offended—did look offended. As for me, I was as savage as a bear. Our pace quickened as our tempers rose, I suppose, and at last we simultaneously awoke to the fact that we had walked twice round the garden, at the rate of four and a half miles an hour, without speaking a word. The situation was sufficiently ludicrous, but I, at least, was in no laughing humour; and Lady Rose only said, "As we are not walking for a wager, Captain Bruce, suppose we go a little slower, unless, perhaps, you're tired, and would like to go into the house."

"Thanks, no," I said, "not at all; but I'm afraid I am not a very amusing companion. Perhaps I had better relieve you of my stupidity and go back to camp."

"I don't know what has happened, I'm sure," cried

Lady Rose, in a tone of real distress. "You seem to be offended with me; what have I done? We used to be friends; tell me what I have done."

Her voice was kind and gentle again, and her manner was an olive-branch in itself; and I replied, mollified but hopeless—

"Nothing at all, I assure you; I'm stupid, I know I'm agitated, in fact, because I have come to tell you something that—that agitates me, and will agitate you."

Again the bright colour flushed into her face, and her eyes became larger and more lustrous as she looked fixedly at me for one moment, and then drooped them, speaking not a word.

"Do you remember our last conversation, Lady Rose?" I said, after a pause.

"Yes, I remember it," she said, still looking down, and speaking very low.

"Then—then I have come to tell you what I suppose will now be indifferent to your cousin, however."

"Oh! what is that?" she cried, eagerly.

"I suppose," I continued, in a voice of the deepest gloom—"I suppose the delicate matter of which we spoke is now quite uninteresting to her?"

"Uninteresting to her? Why so?"

It might have puzzled the Seven Sages, certainly, to tell how I had arrived at that conclusion, and I replied, somewhat abashed—

"No matter; I had fancied so, I cannot tell why."

"Uninteresting to her! No, it is everything to her. She has been bearing her troubles beautifully, indeed—with a wonderful patience; and latterly she

has seemed far more hopeful and cheerful ; but I am convinced—I know—that all the happiness of her life is bound up in this sad mysterious affair. Have you any ray of hope to give her ?—to give us ? ”

“ Not a mere ray of hope, Lady Rose,—I have come to announce the full sunrise of their happiness. The clouds are dispelled ; the difficulties have faded away. They are free ! ”

“ Free ! and you have done this ? you ? Oh, Captain Bruce ! what shall I do ? what shall I say to you ? This is too much happiness—but how ? Tell me, oh, tell me again, that it is so ! ”

“ It is so, indeed, Lady Rose ; and a great happiness it is to me to know it is so, and to bring you the news. I have been an instrument, certainly, and, I need not say, a zealous one ; but we have more reason to thank the extraordinary likeness between Captain Burridge and myself, than anything else. I have *much* to thank that likeness for ; but will you sit down here in the shade and I will tell you ? ”

And I told her the whole story, and I made it as long as possible ; and I would have liked to tell her it over and over again, that I might have sat and looked into the heaven of her face, seen her bright eyes beaming with happiness and excitement, and heard her sweet voice breathing praise and gratitude to me.

In vain were all my disclaimers. I was the deliverer—the good angel—and none but I. I had saved her cousin—I had saved my friend. It was noble of me. She would never forget it all her life ; and so I found myself the hero of the hour.

"But," she said, suddenly, "we ought to go in and tell Mary, ought we not?"

Then I told her that Burridge was in the town, and waiting to be sent for.

"Shall we," I said, "let him be his own herald, and tell her himself that their troubles are over?"

"It would be delightful—it would be more than delightful: but no; I fear it might be too much for her. You shall go and bring him, and I will prepare her. I am in a fever of curiosity to see him; is he really so like you?"

"Yes, Lady Rose, he is really so like. We shall be obliged to tie ribbons of different colours on our arms, or you will be mistaking us."

"I don't believe *I* shall."

"What colour shall Captain Burridge have?"

"Oh! he must wear Mary's colour, of course—blue."

"And I, Lady Rose? what shall I have?"

"Oh! you must study your own taste," she said, blushing.

"Then it shall be rose!" I cried.

"I don't admire your taste; come, let us go and make Mary happy."

"Not yet, Lady Rose,—not yet, I implore you! Look at this—this withered flower. You gave it to me—you gave it to me. It is dead and withered now; but with it you gave me a hope that is full of life. My hope has lived on these dead leaves, and I on it. Do you remember your promise?"

"I—I promised you—a flower," she faltered, looking down; "and you shall have it. You shall choose one for yourself."

"And when I choose it—and my choice is easily made—I shall read its language as your own ; I said I would—I warned you that I would. Give me that rosebud in your hand, dear Rose, and say I may." Rose turned away her beautiful head ; the hand that clasped the rosebud fell by her side, but gently yielded up its treasure.

CHAPTER XX.

"There's a double sweetness in double rhymes,
And a double at whist and a double 'Times'
In profit are certainly double.
By doubling, the hare contrives to escape ;
And all seamen delight in a doubled Cape
And a double-reefed topsail in trouble.
But double wisdom and pleasure and sense,
Beauty, respect, strength, comfort, and thence
Through whatever the list discovers,
They are all in the double blessedness summed
Of what was formerly double-drummed,
The marriage of two true lovers."

—HOOD.

The sun passed away from over the great elm-tree under which we sat—passed away and far down on his westward journey—and still we did not move, or mark the flight of time. These moments that come but once a life—moments in hours, and hours in moments—are isolated by emotion from the rest of existence. In them, and in them alone, are the two consenting souls cut off from all else besides. For them time stands still, the past and the future are annihilated, memories

and hopes and fears are dead, so intense, so exquisite this concentration on the present.

Poor Mary! Poor Adolphus! What were their waitings, their anxieties, their joys to us? All forgotten. That engrossing solicitude for them, what had become of it, then? Was it only a veil that *had* taken the shape of the covered statue—cast aside, forgotten, and neglected when the hour had come and the revelation had been made? It looked too like it. Hours had passed, and I am sure the pair of whom we had made such a tragedy had never crossed the thoughts of either.

“Upon my life, now, it’s true, my little darling—never slept a wink—couldn’t, you know—hated everything—hated everybody—hated myself—like poison—looked at my pistols now and then—thought I’d shoot myself, you know—didn’t though—because I thought, while there’s life there’s hope—something’s safe to turn up, and I’ll marry my little angel after all.”

These were the first sounds from the outer world that broke upon our reverie. We started up.

“What is that?” cried Rose.

“Hush! look,” I said, “we are forestalled;” for there, on the other side of a tall row of shrubs behind our resting-place, slowly passing down the walk, were Burridge and Mary. His arm was round her waist, and her bright sunny face was looking up into his with an expression of ineffable content.

“We must have been here for hours,” I said, “although it seems but a moment. We had forgotten all about our poor friends. What a shame! but all’s

well that ends well, and I daresay they will easily forgive us."

"He is not a bit like you," said Rose; "and I shall quarrel with any one who says he is. His voice is so slow and drawling, too. I don't think I am going to be very fond of him, do you know. I wonder how he found his way in."

"He has been giving you a silent serenade every night for the last month—a song without words—without an air either, by the by; so he knew his way as well as I do."

"Oh the horrid prying creature!"

"Yet I would have done the same in his place; and when you found it out, you would have forgiven me, would you not?"

"Perhaps."

At this moment (both her hands were in mine, and—well, never mind) I was aware of a female figure that looked for a moment through the bushes, gave a slight scream, and vanished.

"My aunt!" cried Rose. "Dreadful! what *will* she think?"

"She won't have long for reflection, at any rate; in half an hour we will unfold the dreadful tale. And now I wish you would take me to the greenhouse where I was with you the *first* day, when you gave me the geranium, you remember; I want to compare my present feelings with my past, to look at the rosebud and think of the geranium. By the by, that flower made me very unhappy. Why did you give it to me? and why did you laugh so?"

"Never mind, I am never going to smile again; and

I think what you have done to-day justifies the gift. Do you know, you have lost all my respect now, and actually forfeited your national character."

"How?"

"Why, you have committed yourself."

"And you have become a Scotchwoman to-day, *d'avance*."

"I don't see it."

"Yes, you have—you gave me an indirect answer."

"Shall I retract it."

And, thus talking and laughing, we passed into the greenhouse, where we had not long been when we heard voices outside.

"Bless me, Badger! is that you?"

"Yes, Mrs Badger, me it is."

"Oh Lord! I've got such a turn."

"So have I; what's turned *you* up?"

"Oh heavens! such a surprise—such a— Oh Lor! *that* Captain Bruce, what do you think? under the elm-tree, there—over there—go and look at them. He and Rose—such goings on! Kissing, Badger!—kissing, I declare!"

"Bruce and who?" roared Badger.

"Rose."

"Rose! nonsense—you're dreaming. Why, down there, beside the waterfall, I'll be hanged if he isn't there, this blessed minute, with Mary! and as for kissing and hugging, isn't he just?"

"But it wasn't Mary."

"But it was, and it wasn't Rose."

"But it was."

"Then all I've got to say, old lady, is, that you'd

better make yourself scarce, or he'll be at *you* next; nothing will stop a fellow of that sort if he once begins."

I thought this a good moment for a *coup de théâtre*; so, taking Rose by the hand, I led her out, and confronted the old couple.

"Here he is," shouted Badger.

"Here I am, Mr Badger; how are you? here's 'the impostor; ' how are you, Mrs Badger?"

"Wh-wh-wh-what does it mean, sir? What are you up to? what's your game, eh, sir?" stammered the stockbroker.

"Matrimonial, Mr Badger; we're engaged to be married,—wish us joy."

"The devil! to how many of them are you engaged?"

"Only to one. Lady Rose has made me very happy; I'm quite satisfied with one, I assure you."

"Very moderate, I'm sure. And the other, sir? what the devil do you mean to do with her? I saw you—with my own eyes—at the waterfall—ten minutes ago—what is she to be? A spiritual wife is it, or what? Mind you this aint Mormon country. Explain yourself, sir."

"So I will, in three words: the happy man at the waterfall is my double."

"Whew!" whistled Badger, incredulously; "and you carry out your resemblance by both getting engaged to be married on the same day—in the same garden—to first cousins—he to a girl he never saw before. It won't wash, sir! it won't wash!"

"Nonsense, uncle," said Rose; "listen to Captain Bruce; he'll tell you the story. Do, Donald, quickly."

"The story is rather a long and rather an intricate one, but I will give it you as shortly as I can, so that you may at least understand that I'm not a Mormon."

And so I did, the worthy couple all agape the while, and Mr Badger shaking, from time to time, the framework of the greenhouse, with portentous cataracts of laughter. When my little *r  sum  * was concluded, there was quite a *tableau*; Mrs Badger embracing her niece, and weeping great round East-end tears of happiness and excitement. Again and again were her brawny arms tossed into the air, and again and again was poor Rose enveloped in their constrictorial circle. As for Badger the exuberant—my arms, wrists, and hands still feel stiff and sore when I think of the worthy fellow's congratulations. He literally put me on the rack, only pausing now and then to cheer away like a whole election mob.

"There's no other fellow," he cried, "no other fellow I should have liked half so well. I wish you could marry 'em both; you deserve them both—don't he, Mrs Badger—don't he?"

"Oh! Mr Badger," I cried, "you are far too flattering; you have been so kind to me all along, that I never can sufficiently thank you; and now, if anything *can* add to my great happiness, it is this crowning kindness of yours—this hearty welcome."

"You deserve it, my boy—you deserve it. John Badger is not the man to give it if you didn't. But, I say, what kind of a fellow is Number Two? Candidly, now, aint he a bit of a flat?"

"He's the best fellow in the world, and you'll like him far better than me,—but holloa! hush! here they

come ; " for at this moment Burridge and Mary hove in sight. They did not observe us at first, but when they did, Mary started and stopped ; Burridge, on the contrary, merely withdrew his arm with great deliberation from her waist, and employing the hand so disengaged in fixing his eyeglass in his eye, advanced with perfect *sang froid*, stolidly regarding our group.

" He's a cool hand, anyhow," muttered Badger.

I went forward and shook hands with Mary, whispering "a thousand congratulations ; " then turning, I said, " Mr Badger, let me present to you my double, Captain Burridge."

" Glad to see you *again*, sir," said Badger, " although" (with a twinkle in his eye) " I saw you only half an hour ago down by the waterfall. I saw you, though you didn't see me, I'll be bound, eh ? ha ! ha ! "

" Can't say I did," replied the unabashed plunger. " Saw you the other night, though—rather too much of you, in fact ; you were anxious to see me, too—drill a hole in me, you know—haw ! haw ! Didn't see me, though, I'll be bound ; banger of yours that —couldn't, you know, cause of the bushes—haw ! haw ! "

" How ? what ? are you the fellow who smashed my white rhododendron ? Oh Mary, you sly little cat ! and I'll be bound you were out on the tiles after him."

" Come now, Mr Badger, 'pon my honour, now, too bad that. She knew nothing about it ; I was cruising on my own hook."

" Really, uncle, I'm quite innocent, I assure you."

"I'll forgive you, I'll forgive everybody, I'll forgive everything! Come and kiss your old uncle, you cat—and Burridge, your hand. I've heard your story; it's a queer one. . . . I think you're a good fellow, a little soft, though, eh?—aint you a *leetle* bit soft, now? But you're a cool hand—I like a cool hand—nothing pays so well in the City. Did you ever think of going into the City, Captain?"

"Yes, once I did," said the literal Dolly; "and I got a map and things, and took best advice, you know; but I was obliged to hire a *commissionnaire* at St Paul's to take me back to the club."

"Haw! haw! haw!" roared Badger, in high glee. "You are a——hang it! I like you; give me your hand again. I suppose I may congratulate you?"

"Oh! of course, of course; it's all settled—week after next, aint it, Mary?"

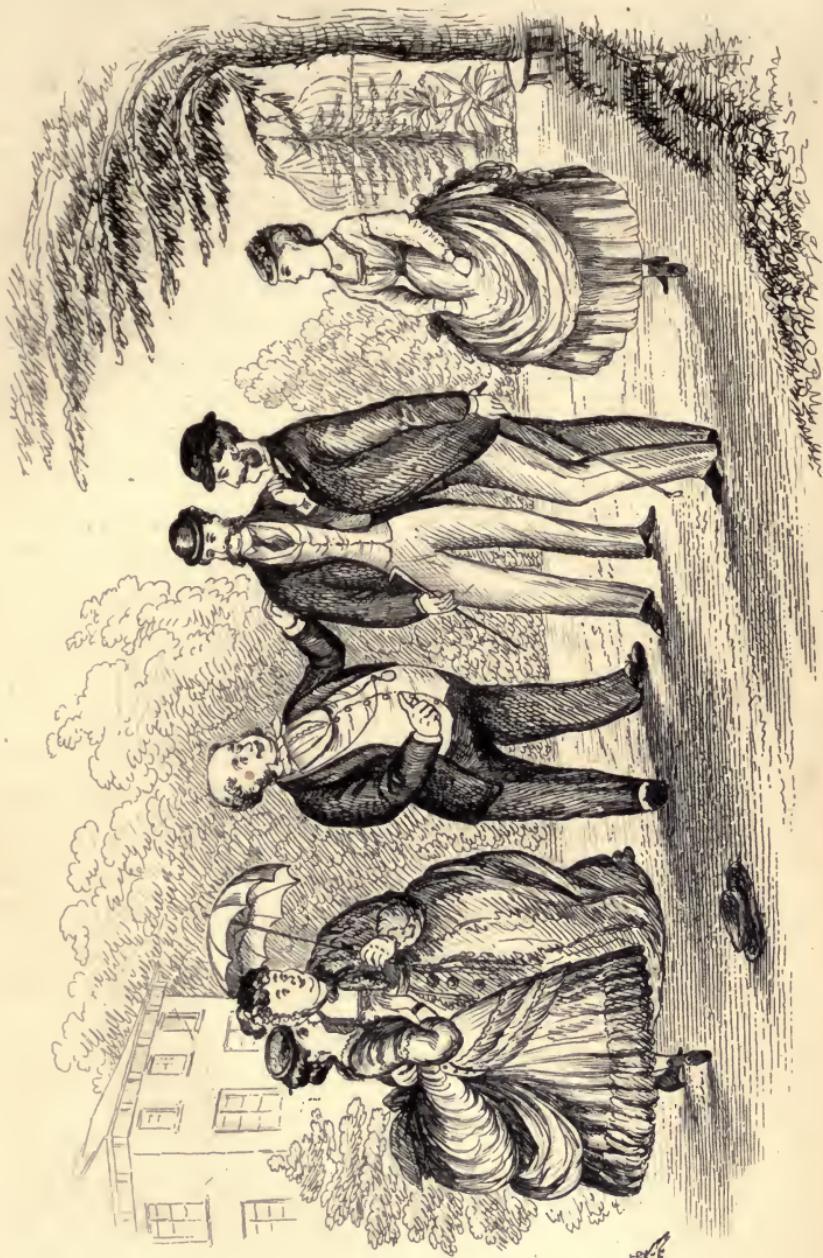
"Now, Adolphus!" remonstrated Mary, with a blush.

"Well, well, it'll all be in good time, no doubt," said Badger. "Ah!—you two Captains are amazingly like, certainly; I'm not surprised I didn't know the difference, though I met you once, Captain Burridge—don't you remember?—at old Timbrel's, at Manchester."

"I remember the old buffer, and meeting a lot of other——"

"Old buffers there, you mean. Well, I was one of them; but you're fatter than our Captain, and not so good-looking—are you, now?"

"Candidly, I think I am, now; and so does Mary, I know."



"Ah! you two captains are amazingly like certain!"

"But Rose doesn't, and Bruce doesn't, and I don't."

"Ah! I must get Mrs Badger to go in for me, then."

"But we should want a casting vote, so let us give it up, and come along to dinner, and let's be jolly; ten dozen of champagne, and twenty dozen of 'twenty port'—that's the programme! Hip, hip, hurrah!" And so *eximus omnes*, Dolly remarking to me, "Couldn't wait all night, you know, in that fusty old inn—thought I'd better just come and settle it myself; so I did."

"And you're not savage at me?"

"Savage! a little child might play with me."

Badger was one of those typical Englishmen to whom a happy event instantly suggests the necessity of abnormal acts of deglutition.

Just as the Romans marked a happy day "with a white stone," the Briton is apt to celebrate it with an extra good dinner; and I am bound to say that, notwithstanding our host's regrets and apologies (and they were long and loud), no amount of warning could have produced, in my eyes, a better one than that beneath which the hospitable hermit's table groaned that night.

What a jolly festival it was! Nectar seemed the wines, ambrosia the viands, and piquant even the somewhat broad humour of the host. The roof rang with his pealing mirth; and again, and again, and again did he replenish an ample goblet, and drain it in our honour—to our health, to our wealth, to our happiness, to our long life, and to other prospective advantages which he might have overlooked. I really

began to be afraid that the threat of the twenty dozen of port was to be carried out.

"There is one thing," he cried, at last, "that I must and will insist on your all pledging yourselves to before the ladies go, and before the Earl arrives—for he'll be here immediately—and that is, that you will faithfully promise and vow to use your best endeavours to bring it about and make it so that both the weddings come off on the same day and in the same church—to wit, the church of F——, to this Hermitage adjacent—and that the banquet (and a banquet it shall be) takes place in this the house of John Badger, London citizen of credit and renown."

"Agreed! agreed!" cried Burridge and I.

"Oh! I don't know what papa will say," said Mary; "he knows nothing about anything yet. I'm afraid he may be dreadfully angry and troublesome—I'm afraid he may——"

"Don't you fret about it, little Mary; set your 'cool hand' there at him. He'll arrange the General, never fear; and so that's fixed. And now, ladies (since you *will* go), when the Earl comes, don't say a word to him about all this; let the poor man have his dinner in peace, and leave the business to us afterwards." It was the first time this rather formidable reflection had presented itself to me—this grim apropos-ness of his lordship's arrival—and my countenance fell.

"Don't be afraid of the Earl, Bruce," said Badger, perceiving it; "he's an easy man, and a silent man, and a devilish stupid man; but he's a gentleman and a good-hearted fellow, too, is Belturbet. By the by—

ahem—eh? excuse me—I suppose the settlements will be all right, my boy?"

"Oh yes! I think so. I have next to nothing myself, but I have an aunt who is rich and kind, and she has promised me something very like *carte-blanche*."

"And if you hadn't a rich aunt (and here's to her jolly good health), my boy, Rose has a rich uncle, as, perhaps, you'll find out some day, if you're civil to him, and come to see him often enough. Well, well, that's all right. As for you, Burridge, I hear you're as rich as a Jew, so you and your old cockatoo of a father-in-law-that-is-to-be may fight it out as you like. Bruce, would it be any relief to you if I was to speak to the Earl? I could give you a good character, you know, and that sort of thing—as you like, though?"

"I think I had better speak to the Earl myself," I said; "it would be more *comme il faut*; thanks all the same."

"Very well. But make your story short and simple, and don't use long words; his lordship aint up to more than '*two-syllablers*.' He's mortal stupid, poor old Belturbet."

At last there was the sound of wheels, ringing of bells, hurtling of luggage, light female laughter, and then the Earl was among us.

"Ah! Belturbet," cried his brother-in-law, "glad to see you—that I am; how is your noble self? Dinner's laid for you in the library, but, if you're not ceremonious, you might dine here, and we would be company for you—eh?"

"Oh! here, by all means," said the Earl, who was a tall, gentlemanlike, elderly man, with a good but rather heavy countenance.

"So be it, then. Let me introduce to you my two very particular friends, Captain Bruce and Captain Burridge—better known as the Corsican Brothers."

"Ah!" said his lordship, affably, "saw them t'other night in Dublin—very good—ah! Great fellow, Fechter—ah!" And down sat my lord and attacked his dinner, and never word spake he except when asked a question, when he answered in monosyllables. Once indeed, but once only, did he volunteer a remark, and that was when I happened to say I had been in Jamaica. The Earl, thereupon, laid down his knife and fork, looked at me solemnly for a minute, and then said, "By Jove! were you in Jamaica?" and on my reiterating the assertion, replied, as if in intense astonishment at the coincidence, "By Jove! so was I—ah!"

Clearly the Earl was not likely to put many questions to me, or unnecessarily prolong the impending interview.

Intensely puzzled and mystified he did look, though, when Badger requested him to give me a few minutes' private conversation.

"By all means," he said, however, with great politeness. "Now? or when?"

"Now, if you will be so very kind," I said.

"Certainly—ah!"

In another minute I was in full career, telling my tale of love. The Earl never moved a muscle of his

face, but listened to my story as if his mind had been inadvertently left on the other side of St George's Channel.

You don't often meet a really stupid Irishman ; but if you do, does it not seem as if nature was trying to make one individual blockhead contribute the share of a score towards the aggregate mass of human stupidity, or towards levelling down his nation to the general average in that respect ? I am bound to say, however, that the Earl listened with much gravity to my statement. When I had finished, he said "Ah !" affably—paused, looked at me as if for an idea, and at last, in despair, remarked—

"I'm not used to this kind of thing, you see, Captain Bruce. I'm a little—a little at sea—ah ! there are questions to be asked, I know, but I hate asking questions—ah !" and he glared at me as if for a prompt.

"My solicitors, perhaps, and your lordship's solicitors," said I, "could arrange all business matters, and we need not talk of them. Suffice it to say that my means will be ample ; and as to my birth and social position and general character, my colonel, my brother-officers, and hundreds of (I have no doubt mutual) friends will satisfy you on these points ; and I hope—I hope you will not dislike me very much, if you give your consent."

"Ah !" said his lordship ; "and Rose ? what does she say ?"

"She is flattering enough to join me in my request to your lordship."

"Ah !—she's a good girl—let us go and see her,

ah!" and he held out his hand very cordially; and thus the interview closed.

"All right?" whispered Badger, when we got into the drawing-room.

"I hope so, but his lordship is not very communicative."

"Never is, you know—hasn't got it in him—not an idea," and Badger tapped his forehead. "singular," thought I, "that one so gifted should be the offspring of such a very ordinary old gentleman." I lived to like him, though, and to respect him; and when he died—for (*requiescat in pace*) he is gone—my regret was not mere sympathy for his daughter's sorrow. I think it would be wearisome to go into all details, as to how this lawyer wrote to that lawyer, and this aunt to that papa; how counsel gave one opinion and then another; how Spinks was spoken to, and Wylde communed with; how Badger quarrelled furiously with Sir Rowland Richmond, and made it up; how *trousseaus* were completed, and presents presented, till at last (Badger's kindly whim being honoured), on a bright November morning, Burridge and I, with our respective brides, stood before the altar, in the pretty little old church of F——. And there the two knots were tied in all safety at last, although not without some risk of a mistake, owing to the indomitable woolliness of the noble lord as to the identity of his son-in-law and the double of that gallant officer.

It does not do (to my mind at least it so appears) to pry into the after domestic life of young couples, whose careers we have only undertaken to supervise

until they leave the altar. Surely it is better that the hero and the heroine should here vanish abruptly from the public gaze, glittering with the gems and gawds of the festal occasion, rather than fade from the scene in a drab-coloured atmosphere, extinguished by the appallingly vivid colours of a foreground springing up in front of them—a foreground studded thick with horrors, in pre-Raphaelite style—the obese nurse, the blood-red pass-book, the pea-green perambulator, the infamous feeding-bottle, the ever-recurring infant; and, thinking thus, here I would finish, but that gratitude to my friend (now uncle) Badger compels me to state that the *déjeuner* (at which both the couples were present) given by him at the Hermitage was a banquet indeed. It was set forth in a marquee pitched upon the lawn, and laid down with a floor for a ball in the evening.

The table blazed with plate and bloomed with exotics, and (to quote from the local newspaper) “everything was there that could gorge the eye and appease the appetite.”

Around it were ranged many and many a trusty friend, here and there in combinations rather startling to a connoisseur in social chemistry, Mrs Badger outdoing all her previous achievements in the marshalling of her guests. Aunt Blogg and Sir Rowland Richmond—a ferocious-looking old martinet—were told off to each other, as were John Blackstock and Burridge’s grandmamma. The latter, awfully deaf and slightly doting, enlivened the proceedings by every now and then inquiring, in a far-carrying falsetto, “if in his” (John Blackstock’s) “candid opinion

Mr Badger wasn't a little like the butcher at Wellingborough—just a little, now, about the mouth and eyes?" Then there were friends from the City, and friends from the court, and friends from the camp—friends from England, Scotland, and Ireland; an omnium-gatherum of people of all kinds of grades and professions, but happily combined by the bond of a common goodwill to the young couples, and by the blithesome *bonhomie* of the exuberant host. A jollier marriage-breakfast I never saw, and as it was my own, that is saying a good deal.

At last it was time for us to go; but ere we went, up sprung the London citizen of credit and renown to propose our healths, and he handled the topic with such Homeric fire, and surrounded our marvellous adventures with such a champagny combination of mist and sparkle, as not a little to delight and puzzle his audience. Amid the cheers and laughter and "good healths" which succeeded we made our escape.

"Don't follow them," cried Badger, "there's a clothes-basketful of old shoes all ready here, and we can fire at them as they drive past the tent." So the company remained in ambush in the marquee, aunt Blogg alone disobeying the host's order and pursuing us into the house.

"Just to say 'God bless you' once more, my dears," she explained.

I was right glad to get the opportunity of thanking her. By letter I had done so, of course, and fervently, but what can a letter express compared with living words? "Dear aunt," I said, "it is for me to say 'God bless *you!*'" It is for me to wish that

wish every day and hour of my life ; you have made me the happiest man in all the world. I wish I had words to thank you, but my heart is too full—I can only say ‘God bless you !’—from my heart I say it ; and, after all, what better wish can the heart of man devise ?”

“ And oh ! dear aunt,” cried Rose, “ believe me that I join him in that wish ; I hope—I know I shall try to be a good niece, and to repay with my warmest love, at least, what you have done for us. God bless you, dear aunt ! ” She threw her arms round the good old lady’s neck and kissed her, and the good old lady retired precipitately into the interior, sobbing that she must go away, or she would make a fool of herself.

We were soon ready for a start, and nothing remained to be accomplished but the private adieux of the two couples.

“ We are both ‘ Doubles ’ now, Dolly,” I cried, as we grasped each other’s hands in the hall.

“ Yes ; and as you got me my wife and I got you yours, we’re ‘ Quits ’ too. Ha ! ha ! ha !

“ ‘ DOUBLES AND QUITs ! ’ ”

And we both laughed loudly, for a small joke goes a long way with a light heart—which I hope you have, dear reader, for your own sake as well as mine.

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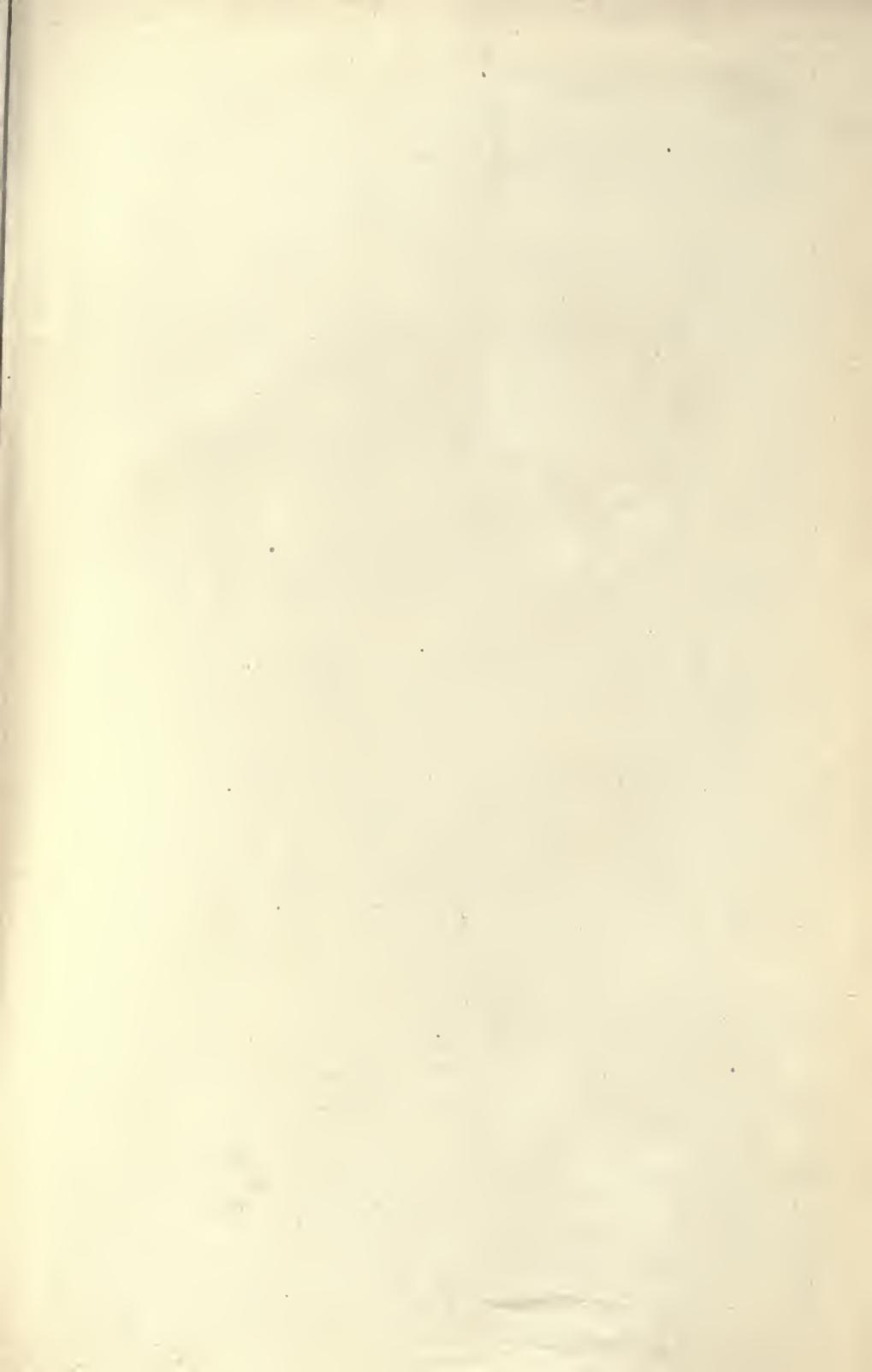
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